

CONFERENCE REPORT

Citizenship, Democracy and the Culture of Transactional Politics in Nigeria

November 13-14, 2018

Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation
Abuja



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The 2019 general elections represent a potential flashpoint for violence, fuelled by illicit cashflows and rampant divisive behavior. If left unchecked, these features of our political culture could drive Nigeria to the brink – with grave humanitarian consequences for the sub-region and beyond.

In order to address this potential challenge, the Foundation convened a two-day conference on the culture of transactional politics and its impact on participatory democracy and accountable governance in Nigeria. The conference developed strategies for institutional reform in an effort to reduce retail corruption in Nigeria and brought forward commitments from key stakeholders to reform political campaign funding post 2019.

TrustAfrica seeks to strengthen African initiatives that address the most difficult challenges confronting the continent.

- Securing the conditions for democracy
- Fostering African enterprise and achieving broadly shared prosperity
- Cultivating African resources for democracy and development

Introduction



I am pleased to convey the Yar'Adua Foundation's sincere appreciation to Trust Africa for supporting the just concluded conference, *Citizenship, Democracy and the Culture of Transactional Politics in Nigeria*. The Foundation is also grateful to the many friends and partners who contributed to making the conference a success. The event offered a valuable opportunity to address the transactional nature of Nigerian politics which is a major driver of corruption and ethno-religious tension. Sadly, the exchange of goods and services for political support and the absence of institutional mechanisms to legitimately finance political parties and candidate campaigns continues to pose grave threats to democracy in Nigeria.

Although campaign expenditure is hardly ever disclosed in Nigeria, it is understood that meeting the demands of overwhelming clientelism constitutes the major part of political spending. Remarks by the INEC Acting Chairman, Prof. Antonia Okoosi-Simbe revealed INEC's commitment to track campaign finance and vote buying and monitor political activities to ensure a transparent, free, fair and credible electoral environment in 2019 and beyond.

We were honoured to have Prof. Benjamin Page from Northwestern University, Chicago and key experts in political and security matters address the conference. Panel discussions by thought leaders and a mock presidential debate increased awareness and understanding of the connection between transactional politics and poor governance in Nigeria.

The Yar'Adua Foundation is proud to have made this important contribution to the growth of civic spaces in Nigeria. We remain committed to providing platforms for dialogue that foster a prosperous and inclusive nation.

Jacqueline Farris
Director General
Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation

Welcome

Mallam Murtala Yar'Adua

Treasurer, Board of Trustees
Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation

Mallam Murtala Yar'Adua expressed delight at the turn out of stakeholders and influencers as it indicated that Nigerians are willing to join forces in fighting the nature of transactional politics.

He suggested that Nigeria has a long way to go in achieving the desired transformation and thanked TrustAfrica for supporting this initiative to strategize on practical ways of curbing the culture of transactional politics in Nigeria.

He concluded his remarks with the hope that the conference would show how corrupt practices affect Nigerians and produce recommendations that will channel Nigeria towards the path of quality development while addressing issues that seek to divide us and undermine the peace and stability of Nigeria.



The theme for the conference is apt at a time when money politics has become the norm in our political landscape.



Unless the corrupt political system that exists in all spheres is addressed, there is little that can be done to instil transparent and accountable candidates in governance.

Remarks

Dr. Kole Shettima

Director, MacArthur Foundation

Dr. Kole Shettima began his remarks by sharing stories that demonstrate how political appointments in Nigeria are not based on merit. He observed that between 1999-2015, women's participation in politics declined due to its expensive nature. He suggested that the corrupt political system makes it difficult for people of good character to participate in politics.

Dr. Shettima stated that the MacArthur Foundation is committed to developing a culture of transparency and accountability in Nigeria which forms the basis for their partnership with Open Society Foundation and Ford Foundation to support organizations in Africa that are addressing related issues.



Opening Address

Political Campaign Finance Reform in Nigeria



Professor Antonia Ookoosi-Simbine
Acting Chairman, INEC

The nexus between citizenship, democracy and transactional politics is that transactional politics erodes participation and undermines the principles of democracy.

Professor Antonia Ookoosi-Simbine stated that there can be no democracy without citizens and their effective participation in the process of electing leaders. She suggested there are clear indications of politicians engaging in transactional politics and therefore not working for the public good.

Professor Antonia agreed that the conference was timely because elections conducted in Anambra, Ekiti and Osun states have raised growing concern about vote buying and selling. It was therefore appropriate that the Foundation chose to provide an opportunity for systematic open discussions to seek ways to curtail the negative trends of transactional politics as we advance towards the 2019 general elections.

Professor Antonia hoped the conference would recommend solutions to decrease the growing trends of transactional politics and highlight strategies to curtail the open use of money to distort the freedom of citizen's choice of candidates. She assured the audience that INEC has remained focused and committed to providing a conducive environment for the administration of free, fair and credible elections, including the establishment of a transparent and credible schedule of activities.

She emphasized that INEC will continue to evolve measures to address the negative trend of vote buying and selling which has become the most visible example of transactional politics in recent times. She recalled the Commission's deliberate efforts during the last governorship election to ensure that voters had additional secrecy while casting their votes and were denied opportunity to showcase their votes towards the conclusion of a vote buying transaction.

She announced that the Commission was in the process of publishing the particulars of candidates and assured the audience that the Commission intends to monitor the campaign finance expenditure of candidates and political parties, which will be made public.

She emphasized that the Commission remains committed to evolving innovative strategies that will further strengthen the secrecy of the ballot and curtail or eliminate opportunities for those who chose to engage in dubious activities. She concluded by appealing to CSOs working in the areas of elections and governance to continue to sensitize the electorate about the down side of transactional politics, especially its long-term effect on the political, social and economic development of the nation.



INEC Commitments

- Increase pragmatic planning, training and other initiatives to ensure the successful conduct of credible elections in 2019.
- Ensure integrity, competence and professionalism in the delivery of credible elections in 2019.
- Share election security forces deployment model with the public.
- Engage consistently in effective conversations with security agencies and CSOs.
- Prioritize strategic communication to ensure that technical electoral hitches are not wrongly interpreted as deliberate attempts to favour a particular party or candidates during elections.
- Track campaign finance and implement strategies to curb vote buying in an effort to reduce retail corruption and institutionalize transparency in political parties.



Guest Speaker

An Equal Voice for Every Citizen

Professor Benjamin Page
Northwestern University, Chicago

I believe in majoritarian democracy in which every citizen has an equal voice in making public policy.

Professor Page expressed delight at the opportunity accorded him to address the conference. He confessed that he has been interested in Nigeria for many years but that he is still a beginner when it comes to the complexities of Nigerian politics. He stated that citizens make sensible distinctions among policy alternatives and referred to data analysis of surveys regarding the general nature of public opinion that suggest collective policy preferences:

- Are generally stable over time. They do not often vacillate or change abruptly.
- Do change, and these changes generally reflect new events or new information in reasonable ways.
- Are generally consistent with each other - not confused or mutually contradictory.
- Are coherent and form collective belief systems that have structure and make sense.

He revealed that his research taught him that majoritarian democracy is extremely difficult to achieve and at this moment in history he is not sure that any country in the world comes very close to achieving political equality. In the United States, for example, he has studied hundreds of cases of federal government foreign and domestic policy making and has compared what policies the majority of Americans want with what policies they actually get. It turns out that the two are not very closely related. In fact, when 90% of Americans favor a particular change in policy, they only get that policy change about 40% of the time. Large majorities often lose out. This cannot be called majoritarian democracy.

Professor Page commended INEC and stakeholders for putting in place some of the fundamental foundations for representative democracy. He advised that many further steps may be needed in order to achieve full, majoritarian democracy as different institutions, processes, laws, and practices affect whether

or not all citizens have equal voices in politics. He attributed the reasons for vote buying to lack of economic development, unusually high salaries of certain public officials and the existence of large oil revenues that might be used for corrupt purposes.

Recommendations

- There must be a fully independent, honest, and effective judicial system.
- There must be political equality which involves protection of political liberties, especially freedom of speech, association and action. These liberties are necessary for each citizen to have an equal chance to express opinions and influence public policy. It would be helpful if these liberties are clearly spelled out in the constitution and enforced by a fully independent judicial system.
- Policies favored by the citizenry must be carried out; not forgotten by officials or subverted by arbitrary actions or bribery.
- Democratic reforms that make parties and candidates more responsive to the voters are required.
- A more radical reform that might be worth considering in Nigeria is some form of proportional representation.



PANEL DISCUSSION: Political Participation

The panel brought together thought leaders and experts to explore the nature of transactional politics and its effects on participatory democracy. Discussions focused on political processes, vote-buying and the connection between transactional politics and poor governance in Nigeria. The session concluded with recommendations to combat the dominant culture and reduce public sector corruption in Nigeria.



Discussants

Choreographed Political Processes: Ignored Citizenry

Ms. Ayisha Osori

Executive Director
Open Society Initiative for West Africa

Ms. Ayisha Osori stated in clear terms that politics in Nigeria is stage managed. She explained that choreographed political processes began with the idea of nationhood and who should be involved. A neo-colonial, predatory and exploitative state determined the actors and the process and this has impacted politics and governance, political party cultures and structures, primaries and elections and back to governance.



She recalled a 2004 World Bank study which explained that only 1% of our population benefits from 80% of our oil revenue while we have millions who will never leave poverty. She said that the Nigerian government spends over 100% on recurrent expenditure and obligatory spending and borrows money to fund itself.

Ms. Osori expressed her concern about the proliferation of Nigerian government agencies which she described as symptomatic of an extractive government and unproductive economy making government the biggest employer of labor. She further suggested that the exploitative nature of National Assembly members has been in existence for a long time and recalled that the first action legislators took in 1979 when they were voted into power was to increase their salaries.

The systems and political structures in Nigeria have not changed. They are designed to be exploitative and extractive.

Recommendations

- Organize ourselves to build numbers around our values. The 16 million unemployed citizens, mostly rural and urban youth, should question existing political structures, express outrage at how much those in government earn and challenge the fixed narratives of who votes.
- Disrupt the two-party system and give new candidates a chance.
- Focus on important issues and use demographics to enforce debates and make representation more inclusive.
- Find opportunities for nation-building. CSOs must build national cohesion along lines different from ethnicity and religion and ensure electoral reform. Women voters in the US have been the majority since 1980 and they have forced incremental change and number over 100 in Congress in 2019.
- Build stamina for the long term. Mental and emotional stamina is required for national unity and party building.
- Government should deepen efforts at political inclusivity in terms of fair representation of gender, religion, age and locality.



Discussants cont'd

Primary Elections: Changing the Way We Choose Candidates

Honourable Chudi Offodile

Author and Political Commentator

Honourable Chudi expressed sadness over the large population of unemployed youth in Nigeria. He stated that the more unemployed people in society, the less possibility of creating the kind of system we seek.

He provided an overview of the history of political parties and their selection processes and suggested that during the Ibrahim Babangida era, SDP and the NRC had a better party system and candidate selection process compared to current political party modes of operation. He cited 1979 when governorship candidates in the UPN were successfully selected without primaries and opined that parties should have the right to determine their mode of selection during primaries.

He stated that the 1999 amended Constitution gave the National Assembly the power to regulate the conduct of political parties and that Section 87 of the Electoral Act establishes the processes that must be followed. It also provides for the right of a candidate to contest decisions in court; something that unfortunately has resulted in total confusion, even at the Supreme Court.

Honourable Chudi closed by saying that political parties should have the absolute power to select the candidate best suited to represent their parties. He stated that the courts should continue to have the power to judge whether internal rules of selection processes of a party are adhered to.



The Electoral Act regulates the conduct of direct and indirect political primaries. Unfortunately, the process is corrupt.

Government should promote constitutional laws that mandate political parties to practice internal democracy during elections of party officials and candidates.



Discussants cont'd

Transactional Politics: Vote Buying, Clientelism

Professor Jibrin Ibrahim

Senior Fellow, Centre for Democracy and Development

Professor Jibrin defined transactional leadership as a form of trading where members of the political class exchange gifts and, in that process, the purpose of good governance gets defeated. He emphasized that transactional politics undermines the most important principle in a democratic system - the popularity principle. He stated that the basis of democracy is that people present themselves to citizens and citizens select the most popular choice. But due to transactional politics, the choices offered to citizens do not emerge on the basis of the popularity principle because candidates who might be popular are eliminated from primaries.

Professor Jibrin opined that vote buying is reflective of our democracy in Nigeria. He explained it reveals that citizens are beginning to count in the electoral process because conclusions from previous numerous court decisions were that money spent during elections went to godfathers, security agencies and thugs.

He narrated that politicians are now giving money to voters directly which means there is a qualitative improvement in the electoral process and citizens are beginning to matter. He stated however, that when money is offered, the receiver de-legitimizes his or her own vote which prevents citizens from demanding good governance. He further explained that the strategy of clientelizing the voter means the voter becomes the client and obeys the orders of the political elite. He concluded by suggesting that civic and voter education, with a focus on people understanding the dangers of vote buying, should be prioritized.



It is really important that people understand the dangers of vote buying.



MOCK PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE: *The Leaders We Deserve?*

A mock presidential debate performance by Arojah Theatre lampooned the anti-debate political culture of presidential aspirants in Nigeria. Moderated by Ms. Kadaria Ahmed, Daria Media, the debate made the argument that candidates and political parties must win votes based on the strength of their agenda and not the depth of their pockets. The debate ended with a message that a candidate's religious or ethnic background should not be the basis for election. Neither should the electorate consent to selling their votes, no matter how enticing the offer may be.



Performance



Age Beeka, Artist
We Must See a New Nigeria



Deji Ige, Poet
One Nigeria



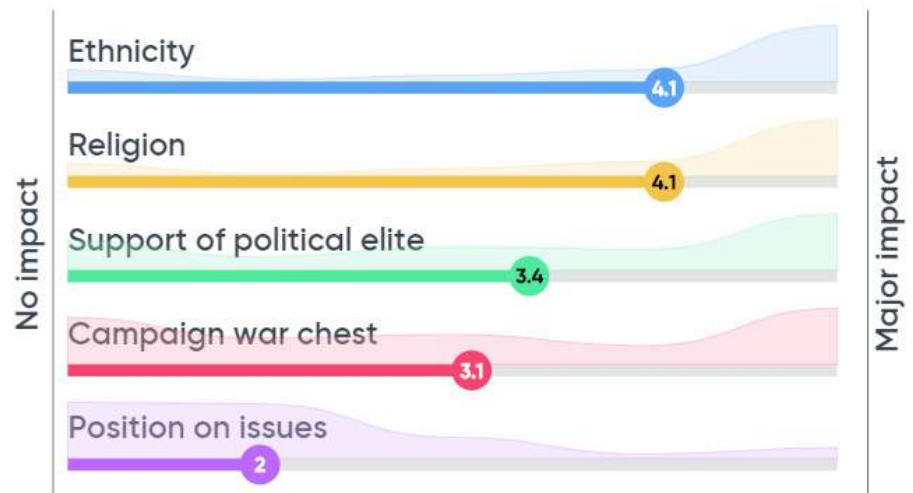
Ms. Efe Oraka, Guitarist
Nigerian Dream

Name one government policy that has positively impacted your life since the last election



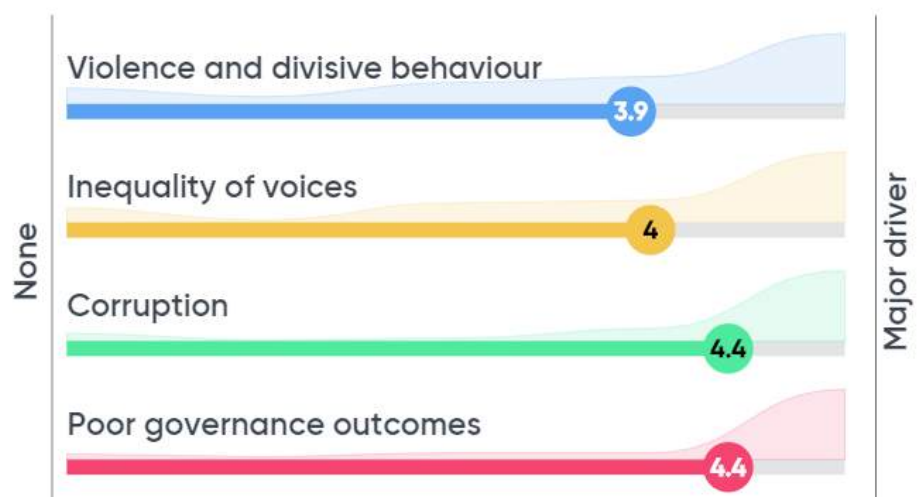
215

Do the following factors affect the chances of a candidate in Nigeria?



99

How much does the culture of transactional politics contribute to the following?



99

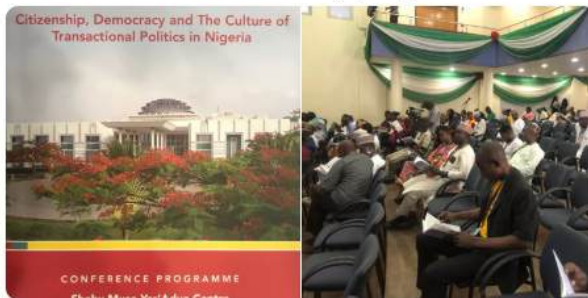
Social Media Interaction



WRAPA Nigeria
@WRAPANG

Following

WRAPA is live at the Conference Programme by Yar'Adua Foundation @SMYFoundation "Citizenship, Democracy and The Culture of Transactional Politics in Nigeria" at the Shehu Miss Yar'Adua Centre Abuja, Nigeria.



8:29 AM - 13 Nov 2018

Yar'Adua Foundation @SMYFoundation · Nov 13

Guest Speaker, Prof Benjamin Page of Northwestern University, Chicago delivering his remarks: An Equal Voice for Every Citizen. #MoneyAndElections



Connected Development [CODE] @Connected_dev · Nov 13

We are participating at a 2-days "Citizenship, Democracy & The Culture of Transactional Politics in Nigeria" Conference in #Abuja organised by @SMYFoundation to develop strategies for tracking & countering divisive behaviour during #NigeriaDecides2019. #NationalCohesion



SERDEC @serdecnig · Nov 14

Panel Discussion on countering divisive behaviour around 2019 Election @SMYFoundation conference on Citizenship, Democracy and the culture of Transactional Politics in Nigeria



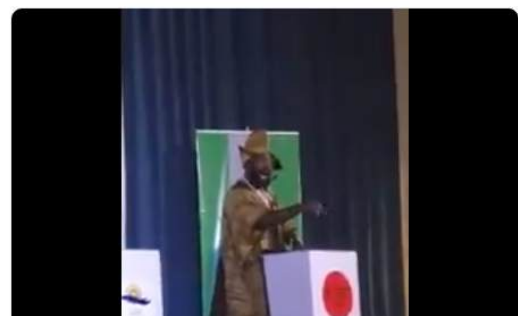
Ayisha Osori
@Najavote

Follow

"If I win I will increase the school fees in public & private schools in order to attract FDI.

SAP- bite them!" 😊

Chief Demola Peters, Soldier Ant Party, Presidential Candidate at the Yar'adua Centre mock debates.



Africmil @Africmil · Nov 13

#StopVoteSelling Dr Koie Shettima speaks on Citizenship, Democracy & the Culture of Transactional Politics in Nigeria. @SMYFoundation .@conumah .@macfound .@CDDWestAfrica .@inecnigeria .@YOUTHFORPOLITIC .@YIAGA



2019 ELECTIONS: Countering Divisive Behaviour

Remarks

Mr. Innocent Chukwuma
Director, Ford Foundation

Mr. Innocent revealed that divisive behaviour increases during election periods because politicians, political parties and their allies often resort to divisive messages when they realize they are losing out. He suggested that the drivers of negative narratives are going beyond national boundaries, adding that there are foreign countries and interest groups exploiting the fault lines in pluralist societies in order to achieve their goals. He concluded his remarks by urging participants to:

- Use available tools on social media to verify messages and video content before sharing them with social networks.
- Not give in to the default mode of believing the worst about those among us. Nigerians are good people.
- Collectively pressure politicians to clearly state how they intend to improve the health, education and infrastructure sectors of the country.



Divisive behaviour and narratives have become pervasive. We must pay attention to them if we want to prevent Nigeria from conflagrating.



Until we learn not to speak hate, we have to live with the threat that hate speech could spark violence.

Monitoring Hate Speech

Mr. Y. Z. Yau
CITAD

- Particular attention should be paid to ensuring impartial regulation of social media to tackle inflammatory rhetoric, hate speech and misinformation that could trigger electoral violence.
- Hate speech can be monitored on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs and online newspapers.
- In the context in which hate speech spreads over the communication realm, we can preempt its consequence by either neutralizing or countering it.
- We have to know the types of hate speech circulating before we develop effective strategies to counter them.
- In Nigeria we do not have a hate speech law, but a number of media regulatory laws prohibits hate speech.

2019 ELECTIONS: Countering Divisive Behaviour cont'd

Mapping Hotspots

Mr. Benson Olugbuo
CLEEN Foundation

- Election security has become a key consideration in national and international efforts to deepen democracy.
- CLEEN conducted a survey in 12 states to explore the security environment in the run-up to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.
- Hate speech is a potential trigger of electoral violence.
- Partiality of security agents is a major factor that could cause electoral violence.
- There is need for measures to enhance professional competence of security agents during elections.
- Widespread availability and use of hard drugs can precipitate electoral violence.
- There is need for security agencies to engage in a multi-agency mapping exercise to discreetly identify hotspots of drug abuse as well as the networks, routes and actors that sustain drug trafficking and smuggling in each zone/state.
- There is need to adopt and operationalize the Nigeria Police Force Election Security Draft Strategy produced in 2017, strengthen media monitoring, deepen youth empowerment and step up drug interdiction operations.



The conduct and integrity of elections are crucial to the democratic process that any perceived or real threat to elections is often interpreted as a grave danger to the survival and sustenance of democracy.



TRACKING DIVISIVE BEHAVIOUR

Discussants proposed interventions to improve political participation and track divisive behaviour around the 2019 elections. Participants were urged to challenge the existing culture of corrupt practices by political parties and collectively fight against transactional politics so that the practice does not undermine opinions democracy and prevent credible elections.



Ms. Cynthia Mbamalu, YIAGA Africa Initiative; Mr. Ahmad Jumare, NEEM Foundation; Mr. Benson Olugbuo, CLEEN Foundation; Mr. Y.Z. Yau, CITAD; Mrs. Kemi Okenyedo, Partners West Africa Nigeria



Panel Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- Increase campaigns calling for internal party democracy and collaborate with government, media and influencers to fight transactional politics at all levels.
- Make the political process open so everyone has a stake, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or religion.
- Train community members with tools to identify and proactively act on early warning signs at local communities to mitigate violence.
- Create awareness regarding the dangers associated with hate speech to drive positive behavioural change.
- Channel the early signs of political intolerance to organizations who can proffer solutions that avoid punitive action being required.
- Verify the credibility of information provided by known and unknown sources.

Closing Remarks

Mr. Chinedu Nwagu

Project Director, Trust Africa

Mr. Chinedu Nwagu highlighted points made by speakers and commended them for providing insights to the dangers of vote buying and for suggesting strategies to combat the nature of transactional politics in Nigeria. He revealed that he has observed elections in parts of Nigeria and Uganda and that experience has taught him that although elections might be a game of numbers, the game is played by the rules of narratives and those narratives are framed around choices.

He urged participants to continue to push for democracy and hoped that part of our progress towards credible elections would be that Nigerians are free to choose whoever they like and not given limited options of candidates.



There is need to take our conversations beyond the choices offered us.



It is our duty to make our politicians understand that we cannot fall for this dummy - that because we speak the same language, we should vote for them.

Mr. Udo Jude Ilo

Country Officer and Head of Nigeria Office, OSIWA

Mr. Udo Ilo expressed concern regarding the dangers of hate speech in the forthcoming 2019 elections and emphasized the need to develop effective means to counter it. He urged participants to first see themselves as Nigerians before anything else and shun divisive behaviour from politicians ahead of the elections. He also stated that there is need to inform the public to vote for candidates based on the strength of their agenda and not ethnicity or religion as it undermines democracy.

Mr. Ilo empathized with young people who have the most onerous task of changing the narratives of Nigeria and they should embrace that task. He concluded by stating that a new Nigeria is possible with a different mindset of young people, dedication and consistency.

Conclusion

The transactional nature of politics in Nigeria has resulted in corruption becoming a political necessity.

Faith in governance has been decimated by a history of inept leadership, weakened institutions and rampant corruption. Citizens have developed a sense of fatalism that has led to a demand for immediate gratification over the expectation of long-term benefits they would derive from fiscally prudent policies. Consequently, the political class remains under persistent pressure to satisfy an overwhelming demand for patronage in order to achieve or maintain power.

Vote buying has assumed an increasingly worrisome scale in recent elections. Experts argue that there is a strong link between the growing incidence of poverty and vote buying in Nigeria as electoral choices are more likely to be influenced by the financial inducement of poor people.

Collective action is required if the fight against corruption is to be won. New, strategic approaches are needed to reform Nigeria's political culture. Parties must improve their internal democracy and INEC must increase its capacity to monitor campaign financing. Political leaders must inspire faith in anti-corruption efforts by implementing tangible reforms in public institutions. Civil society and community leaders must create incentives for collective action against corruption by developing and promoting social contracts that reward accountability and enforce social sanctions for corruption.

Increased awareness and understanding of the connection between transactional politics and poor governance outcomes resulting from this conference is a first step toward galvanizing collective action. Commitments from key stakeholders to reform political campaign financing and increase the transparency of our political processes reinforces our belief that participatory democracy and accountable governance is possible in Nigeria.







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