



Albatross of N70 trillion debts on next Government

The obvious deterioration of the country's public financial situation under the Muhammadu Buhari administration appears to be unrelenting and manifesting in the growing and unsustainable level of the country's public debts and other liabilities. It has now become obvious that the incoming administration at the federal level may be bedevilled with a burden of as much as N72 trillion in debts and other liabilities to contend with. All these are happening at a time when the humongous increase in the level of oil theft is unabating.

And in all these, the Federal Government has not deemed it fit to take responsibility in any form or shape in relation to all these anomalies as it relates to this level of unprecedented deterioration in the country's public finance and in the economy generally. These are happening despite the fact that President Muhammadu Buhari himself is the de facto Minister of Petroleum Resources. This frightening situation raises serious cause for alarm as to what sort of future the present administration is bequeathing on the present and future generation of Nigerians. Indeed, all is not well with the Nigerian society under the watch of Muhammadu Buhari.

There is a huge and frightening level of public debts and liabilities waiting to be transferred to the next administration as things stand presently. These public debts and liabilities come in different forms. First, there is the traditional public debt portfolio made up of both foreign and domestic debts.

These are in the region of N45 trillion as at July 2022. Then there is the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Ways and Means advances or overdrafts to the Federal Government which is currently over N20 trillion, for which the government had planned to securitize, in contravention of the management of Ways and Means advances as stipulated in the CBN Act 2007. Then there is the case of both documented and undocumented contingent liabilities which include debt obligations to road contractors up to the tune of about N11 trillion including unpaid certificates for executed works, pending financial liabilities to non-lending bi-lateral and multilateral institutions both at the regional and global levels. Other undocumented contingent liabilities such as the withheld salaries of members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), pension arrears of some government agencies and other public sector employees as well as to projects such as the NNPC-AK Gas Pipeline Project and the Nigerian Ports Authority, among others are also pending.

The list is seemingly endless and it would take a yeoman's job for the incoming administration to unravel the various liabilities poised to be transferred to it by the Muhammadu Buhari administration. Invariably, these liabilities would balloon further between this time and May 29, 2023 when the tenure of

the Buhari administration will come to an end. These are not cheering news at all. It is also sickening to think that the vexatious issues of budget padding, which surfaced in the early days of the Buhari administration are a thing of the past; the matter appears to have resurrected and blames are being apportioned within the top hierarchy of the administration as to who is liable or not. This is not to lose sight of the sad state of debt serving where currently, debt service payments are gulping virtually all the revenue earnings of government. Indeed, these are sad times in the management of the country's economy. Nigeria does not deserve all these.

In as much as the incurring of public debts and other liabilities is not strange in the management of an economy, the challenging part in the Nigerian situation is the huge level of indiscipline on display by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari and his team. This is more lamentable considering that this same administration came into office in 2015 with lots of promise and enthusiasm to turn around the fortunes of the Nigerian economy. These have turned out to be a fluke. All the Nigerian public is pestered with on a regular basis are cries of low revenue, blame game particularly of the Goodluck Jonathan administration and unfavorable developments in the global economy. There is no iota of taking responsibility for the state of the economy in any way, pointing to the notion that government is either bereft of ideas to salvage the crisis, or is simply unwilling to exert itself.

Quite recently, the Federal Government which had mounted questionable social inclusion programmes with limited positive results has turned around to blame the state governments for the growing level of poverty in the country. This lack of responsibility for any failures in governance has made the administration to always blame someone or something for its woeful performance. Of a truth, the administration met a bad situation when it came into office in 2015 but with successive missteps in the management of the country's finances, it has ended up making it worse many times over.

What the country needs now is a new and prudent manager of resources to take over the reign of power in 2023. A continuation of the Buhari 'legacy' of unbridled dislocation of meaningful fiscal and monetary policies to assault the economy would be disastrous for the Nigerian society. Cases of failed states abound globally and Nigeria has no business joining the train in this regard. Focus should be placed on cutting the cost of governance even before a new administration takes office in May 2023.

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