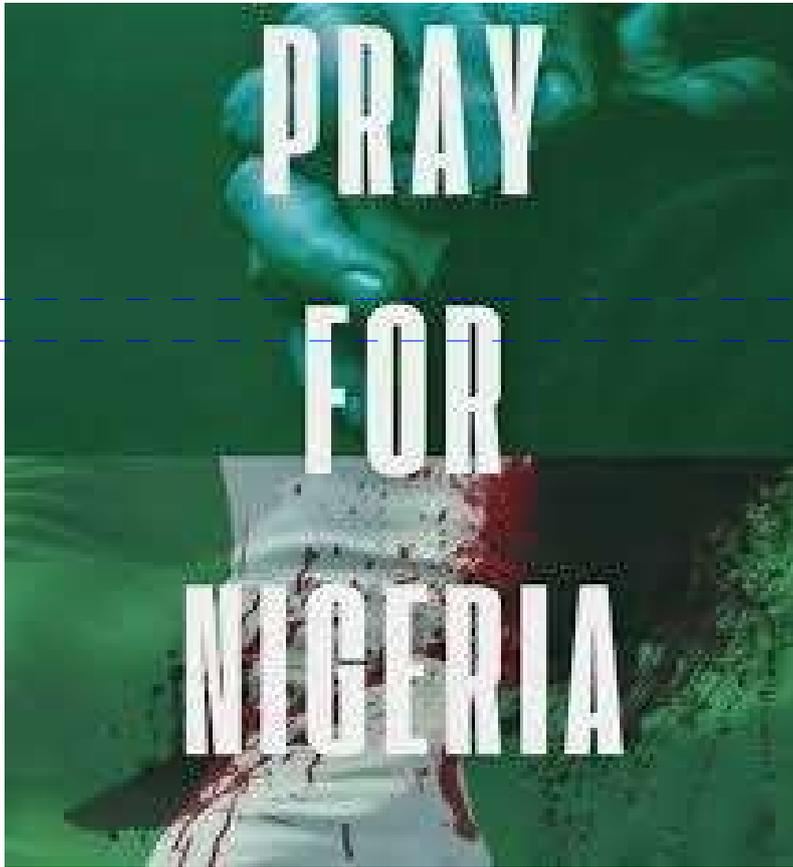


Nigeria:

Bruised but Not Shattered

(Part One)

By *BOD' ORIADE*



Of all African nations, none is as lavishly endowed as Nigeria. Nature has been unusually generous, layering her soil with fertile flora and fauna, embedding precious solid minerals beneath her crust, and crowning her Niger Delta with fossilized ecosystems that continue to yield staggering wealth. From oil and gas alone, fortunes running into billions of dollars have flowed annually for decades. Yet, year after year, Nigeria's leaders have treated this providence with reckless disdain. God's abundance was taken for granted; sleaze became endemic, corruption normalized, and nationhood itself bruised; badly managed, poorly stewarded, and repeatedly betrayed. In 2007, while extolling Nigeria's stature as the Giant of Africa, the late President Nelson Mandela delivered a sobering rebuke: "Yes, Nigeria stood by us more than any nation, but you let yourselves down, and Africa and the black race very badly. Your leaders have no respect for their people. There is a level of poverty in Nigeria that should be unacceptable. Please don't let it happen." Mandela urged Nigeria to embrace honest leadership, invest heavily in education, and instill in its youth the values of hard work and sacrifice. These remarks, drawn from a 2007

interview with Dr. Hakeem Baba-Ahmed, were less a condemnation than a warning, one that echoes painfully today. The lingering question is unavoidable: Has the plundering stopped?

To many observers, what we are witnessing is not an end, but merely a continuation, perhaps even a prelude. Hardly had the colonial-era heists faded when Nigeria was jolted on December 31, 1962, by the revelations of the Coker Commission of Inquiry. The probe into the Western Region Marketing Board exposed a troubling pattern: a £6.7 million public loan was extended to a regional investment company, of which only £500,000 was repaid. The conclusion was damning, public funds had been diverted into private and party-linked ventures.

Two decades later, history repeated itself. In 1983, the Buhari-led military government accused Umaru Dikko, former Transport Minister under President Shehu Shagari, of embezzling billions of dollars. Some accounts placed the figure as high as \$6 billion, allegedly siphoned from oil revenues and treasury funds. And yet, remarkably, Nigeria survived. Despite the recurring waves of fraud and waste, the country's foreign exchange reserves have not entirely dried up. Instead, they have fluctuated, rising and falling like a wounded but breathing patient, preventing outright economic collapse. Each new government has devised survival mechanisms to absorb shocks and shore up reserves, albeit in trickles rather than torrents, while other resource-rich nations expanded boldly with their petrodollars. On January 22, 2026, The Cable reported that Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves had risen to \$46 billion, the highest level in nearly eight years. Ironically, this rebound now cushions the economic devastation inflicted under the same APC political establishment. By contrast, in January 2015, under the PDP administration, Nigeria's reserves stood at \$34.49 billion. That buffer was later depleted, frittered away by the incoming APC government before resorting to the notorious "ways and means" financing, only to be slowly rebuilt by yet another APC government. This cyclical rise and fall underscores a critical truth: Nigeria's economy possesses a rare elasticity; an uncommon resilience that allows it to rebound even after aggressive pillage by successive governments. Indeed, Nigeria remains blessed. Resources continue to surface, sustaining hope and



propping up aspirations. This providential cushion has kept the economy afloat and the political class perpetually optimistic. The country refuses to sink, despite being under chronic corruption trauma. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, foreign exchange reserves are assets held in foreign currencies to back liabilities and influence monetary policy. The implication is clear: Nigeria's problem is not resources: it is leadership. With genuine leadership that prioritizes domestic production over paper gymnastics, stabilizes reserves, and grows GDP, Nigeria could yet emerge from her stubborn economic downturn. Crude oil and gas remain the principal contributors to foreign exchange reserves, with secondary inflows from diaspora remittances, foreign direct investment (FDI), and portfolio investments. But the future must lie elsewhere, in manufacturing, commercial agriculture, and human capital development. Youth energy must be harnessed, entrepreneurship incentivized, and agriculture scaled for export. When Nigeria produces what it consumes, and exports what it produces, reserves will rise organically. History shows that despite egregious looting and economic sabotage by public and private actors, Nigeria continues to stumble forward.

In September 1994, another storm broke. The Okigbo Panel revealed that during the 1988–1993 Gulf War oil price windfall, about \$12.4 billion flowed into a so-called “Dedicated Account” and was spent with little transparency on questionable projects. Still, Nigeria endured.

Then came the infamous Abacha loot, one of the largest state-level corruption scandals in global history. Estimates place the stolen funds between \$3.6 billion and \$5 billion, with recoveries ongoing for over 25 years. Yet, even today, transparency over how recovered funds were utilized remains elusive. One is left to wonder whether recovered loot simply found new vultures.

And yet, Nigeria stands. Ironically, during the Abacha

years, some of Nigeria's most prolific oil fields were discovered. The Agbami Field (OPL 216/OML 127) alone holds over one billion barrels of recoverable reserves. Deepwater and offshore licensing expanded significantly, laying the foundation that sustains Nigeria's oil economy today. Abacha remains a mixed bag. Not every bush harbors only snakes; some provide shelter. Much of today's oil output traces back to discoveries made in that era. Is Nigeria not blessed?

As the plunder continues, divine providence seems to intercede for the deprived and the hopeful. The

economy regenerates, again and again. On March 12, 2014, former CBN Governor Sanusi Lamido Sanusi told the Senate that the NNPC failed to account for \$20 billion out of \$67 billion in oil sales between 2012 and 2013. Another bruise. Another scar. Truly, it seems corruption in Nigeria is cyclical and knows no bounds. It's different strokes for different regimes.

As the 2027 elections approach, hopefuls once again promise reforms. And Nigerians listen. One fact is indisputable: absent systemic corruption, Nigeria would stand shoulder to shoulder with its global peers. Amid the tempests that clouded the APC Buhari administration, from the Budget, Nigeria's National Assembly approved the securitization of ₦23.7 trillion, ballooning public debt from ₦46 trillion to ₦70 trillion. Ways and Means financing exploded from ₦790 billion in 2015 to ₦23.7 trillion by 2022 - effectively printing money for a privileged few. President Tinubu's early reforms have only begun to scratch the surface of these APC government excesses.

Today, corruption has distorted resource distribution and opportunity. From NEITI data and FAAC reports, states have received over ₦16 trillion in federal allocations under the Tinubu administration alone. Going forward, we will scrutinize performance. States that deliver will be highlighted; while saboteurs exposed. Governors must justify their allocations, or face the verdict of the people. Fuel subsidy removal was long promised by the different political party candidates. Tinubu implemented it swiftly, but now it's becoming counterproductive, with little or no adequate cushioning for the masses. While redirecting funds allocations to states may be sound policy, the real question remains: who watches the state governors? Some underperforming governors now seek refuge through party defections, hoping incompetence will be covered and overlooked. But the people are watching. Nigeria may be bruised, but really, not shattered.