

What Happened to Tinubu's Government of National Competence?

By Martins Oloja

While he was still basking in the euphoria of realizing a lifetime ambition in March 2023 as president-elect, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu promised Nigerians that his administration would not only be a government of national unity but also of national competence. Specifically, there was a statement to that effect on March 16, 2023. In that remarkable message, there was a glimmer of “hope of a better tomorrow”, which Ngugi wa Thiong’o says, “is the only comfort you can give to a weeping child”.

In what looks like Buhari’s “I-Belong-to-no-body” famous speech on inauguration day on May 29, 2015, the president-elect then promised to assemble competent men and women and young people from across the country to build a safer, more prosperous and just Nigeria. The statement titled: “Nigeria: At the cusp of renewed hope” unveiled what Nigerians should expect under his watch. Enunciating his commitment to an economy of double-digit GDP growth, greater food security and a strengthened manufacturing base, the then President-elect said his administration would pursue an active digital economy where young people would have ample space to fulfill their dreams and aspirations. With the elections over, he stressed the need to shun partisanship and join hands with him to build the Nigeria of our dream. While assuring the people of his readiness to serve, the former Lagos Governor said, ‘I have set my course and mind on the leadership of this nation. We have important work to do and I am committed to getting that work done for the benefit of all the people, whether or not they voted for me or even voted at all.

This is not the time for continued acrimony and partisan recrimination. These negative things can incite strong passions, but they are not the pathway to a better nation. Only unity and national commitment can serve that purpose’. He further noted: “I realize that I am the servant of a larger purpose. As such, I have gone straight to work...My team and I have been daily engaged in discussions and meetings refining our ideas and policy solutions so that we can begin actively working toward the common good the very first day we assume office...This great project called Nigeria beckons to us all...I ask that we work together as Nigerians for Nigeria. Those who voted for me, I ask that you continue to believe in our policies and plans

for the country. I also ask that you reach out to your brothers and sisters who did not vote as you did. Extend to them the hand of friendship, reconciliation and togetherness. To those of you who did not vote for me, I ask you to believe in Nigeria and the capacity of your fellow citizens, even those who voted differently than you. The better Nigeria I seek is not just for me and my supporters. It is equally yours....”

On sundry calls for government of national unity, he adds another concomitant note: competence. His words: ‘As your incoming president, I accept the task before me. There has been talking of a government of national unity. My aim is higher than



that. I seek a government of national competence. In selecting my government, I shall not be weighed down by considerations extraneous to ability and performance. The day for political gamesmanship is long gone. I shall assemble competent men and women and young people from across Nigeria to build a safer, more prosperous and just Nigeria. There shall be young people. Women shall be prominent. Whether your faith leads you to pray in a church or mosque will not determine your place in government. Character and competence will. To secure our nation and to make it prosperous must be our top priorities. We cannot sacrifice these goals for political expeditions. The whims of politics must take a backseat to the imperatives of governance.

We have bridges and roads to build not just for commerce and travel but to connect people of different faiths, parties and different outlooks in harmonious dialogue and common purpose....”

Mr. President, let's continue to raise the bar of deconstructing your third year in office. As I had noted here in 2024 on the danger of paying too much attention to the growing cabal of sycophants then, the praise singers have dragged this administration into the danger of failing to recognize voices of reason and responsibility. There has been a great deal of attention to the voices of sycophants and men without chests. Sycophants work for only one thing: selfish interest. Our leader, indeed leader of the most populous black nation on earth, there have been indications that you haven't been listening to feedbacks from the Office of the Citizen, the people who cry daily here that most people can no longer afford food prices across the country. I learnt long ago from my basic literature class that Shakespeare once warned, in this regard that, “the eye

sees not itself but by reflection by some other things”.

There have been too many economic challenges your administration hasn't been addressing. The consequences of your inauguration speech of “subsidy is gone”, hasn't been addressed as food inflation bugbear has compounded the energy crisis, no thanks to 'Strait of Hormuz' and 'Strait of Band A'. Dear President, it is a time, to repeat some of the inconvenient truths to you: that you still haven't raised a government of national competence to complement government of national unity you promised. Doubtless, you have too many public relations 'experts' even outside the presidency. In fact, there are so many of them on different social media platforms who don't sleep. They have become monitoring spirits of the renewed hope agenda. The cyber soldiers are only good at attacking opposition figures and social critics who point out some gaps that should be addressed. How will the noisemakers help in managing hunger in the land? Mr. President, there have been too many distractions along the concourse of the many promises you made in the context of national competence: nation building, national cohesion, protection of our freedom, national security and indeed fixing the broken walls of the economy inherited from your wonderful predecessor.

Here is the thing, Mr. President, you are leading Africa's most populous nation, indeed the hope of the black people of the world. Don't let them watch you on global news platforms commissioning not-so remarkable road networks even in the states. The leader of Africa's most strategic nation should not be dragged to be celebrating three-kilometer roads and multi-purpose centers. After all, a state government has through a successful public private partnership (PPP) set up a very successful airline that is very competitive in the country. Akwa Ibom state can boast of even an airport as the hub of its airline showcasing the promise in federalism. Enugu state too has joined the league and set up an airline through a PPP arrangement. Let your legacy projects be delivered for the people to proclaim them. So, Mr President, the report most of your allies and supporters give you is that it is well. There were responses in 2024 that you had just begun planting. Where are the harvests from the promised government of national competence? Our dear leader, we haven't contextually reported big ideas, big projects from education and health sectors, for instance.

All our leaders still rush abroad for basic medical examinations three years on. None of the many Teaching Hospitals of public Colleges of Medicines and Universities of Medical Sciences can be trusted in 36 states and Abuja in this expansive and blessed federation? No Governor, No Minister has invited you to commission any laboratories of technology in any of our 300 universities. Even within the Federal Capital Territory, the National Hospital once designated Nigeria's apex hospital and the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital can't be patronized by our leaders. No leader in Abuja has visited the National Hospital even for needs assessment.

It isn't a useful health Centre. So where are the manifestations or pieces of evidence of government of national competence? All these will be on the ballot in January, 2027, Mr. President. But then as the ancient word teaches us, you need to plant good trees now as only good trees can produce good fruits. Is it too late in the day to begin to obtain more loans to turn the whole country into construction sites that will employ more people? Why are

you obtaining loans to construct a white elephant project called Badagry-Sokoto Road when all the federal roads that continue to fuel food inflation and claim lives are crying for funding? The Sea Ports you are obtaining loans to modernize need to be integrated and linked to good roads in the absence of integrated railways. Why can't the President wonder why all the political leaders, governors, ministers and our parliamentarians fly over our bad roads in all the regions? What of the federal civil service? How many contextual articles and features have to be written before overhauling the federal bureaucracy that even your office claimed in 2024 hadn't been supporting policy thrust for service delivery initiative of your government? How many times should public policy experts cry out to Your Excellency that without a vibrant civil service supported by a competent presidential bureaucracy, there will be no hope renewed in any agenda? I have covered the highest levels of government for more than three decades.

No matter what we would like the public to know about the federal bureaucracy, the service if well managed still has in its establishments competent officers who can deliver on mandate promise of political office holders. What is needed is good leadership, good communication policies within the talent management cadres in the same bureaucracy. Who are those leading the policy-co-ordination arm of the presidential bureaucracy? Where is technical competence in a State House Permanent Secretary who told the nation at a National Assembly's budget defence session that after allocating a whopping #17 billion on solar energy for the State House only, the Presidential Villa would be disconnected from the national grid? What signal does that send to the rest of the people that are grappling with the 'national greed' classification called 'Band A' that even the presidency couldn't afford? So, Mr. President, if you would like to live up to the promise of leading a government of national competence, you will also have to pay attention to the human capital development sector, notably education and health.

The way this administration has been treating education in the 21st century doesn't renew any hope that Nigeria can lead even the West Coast, let alone the continent that we are being told is rising. In the main, our leader, you need to realize that you cannot build any national competence without comprehensive and robust funding of quality in education at all levels. How many Nigerian universities offering computer science and engineering can play host to Artificial Intelligence Centres and teach Robotics, for instance in this age of the AI? What is happening at the University of Lagos in Computer Engineering alone can't trigger national competence. You need more robust projects in Health Sciences and indeed STEAM subjects including Media and Communication Technology, which is the focal point in the world today. I would like to share this quote from Japan, the 'Land of the Rising Sun' on why they intentionally fund more universities to lead their global competitiveness and national competence: '...Japanese Universities do not follow trends – they set them. It is here the world's most advanced laboratories are located, revolutionary discoveries are being made at local universities, and the quality of Japanese products, equipment and training is renowned around the world...' Funding quality education is the starting point for discussing a government of national competence. *culled from Inside Stuff with MARTINS OLOJA, 'The Guardian' April 25, 2026, Back Page*