

A Nigerian Citizens' Manifesto

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We are the citizens of Nigeria. We are the people whose votes are sought with great enthusiasm every election season and whose voices sometimes become mysteriously faint once the results have been announced. We are farmers and traders, workers and employers, teachers and students, professionals and artisans. We live in crowded cities, neglected villages and communities that appear on the political map mainly when elections are approaching. We belong to different faiths, ethnic groups, regions and political persuasions, but we share the same country and, increasingly, many of the same difficulties. We pay the price when government succeeds slowly, fails completely or spends several years explaining why somebody else is responsible. Every election season, candidates present manifestos telling us what they intend to do for Nigeria. The documents are usually impressive. Roads will be constructed, electricity will become reliable, jobs will multiply, hospitals will work and corruption will be defeated. By the end of the campaign, Nigeria has often been rebuilt several times in speeches. This time, we would like to reverse the microphone. Before candidates tell us what they intend to do with power, we wish to tell them what we expect anyone entrusted with it to do. We are not a political party. We have no campaign buses, no billboards and no matching uniforms. We cannot offer appointments, contracts or bags of rice. What we possess is more fundamental: the votes from which every democratic government derives its authority.

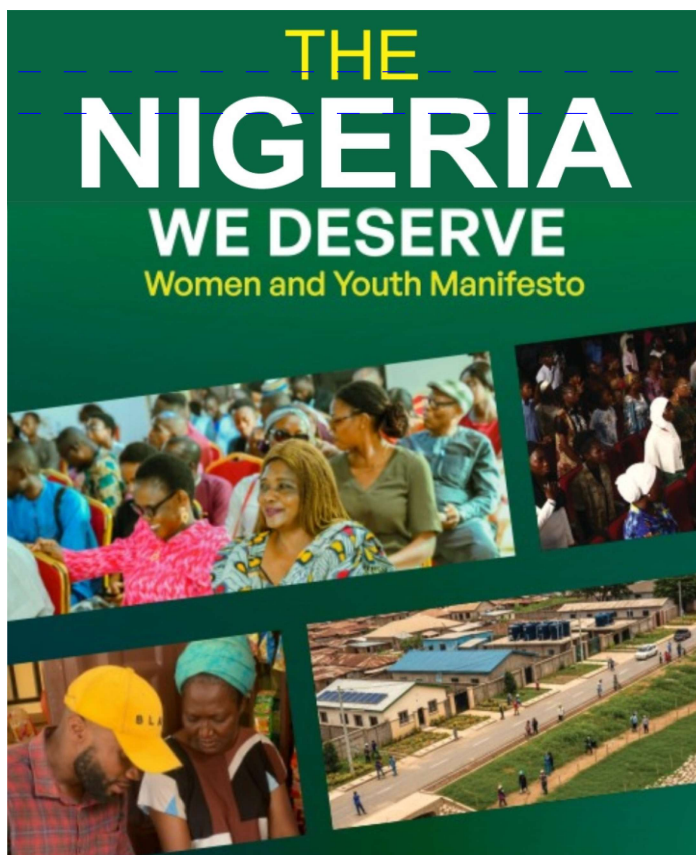
This is our manifesto.

It is addressed to presidents, governors, legislators and local government chairmen; to incumbents seeking another term and newcomers requesting their first opportunity. It is not a catalogue of impossible wishes. It is a statement of the minimum standards by which we shall judge anyone asking to govern us. For once, the applicants

may bring their résumés. We, the employers, are bringing the job description. We Want a Country in Which Life Is Secure. The first responsibility of government is the protection of life. Everything else begins there. A child cannot learn in a school that is unsafe. A farmer cannot produce food on land he is afraid to enter. A trader cannot prosper on a road controlled by kidnappers. Investors do not build factories where insecurity has become an additional tax. We therefore demand a security system that protects every Nigerian, not only those who travel with convoys. Security must be treated as a public right,

not a private service available mainly to those who can afford gates, guards and armored vehicles. We expect intelligence agencies to share intelligence, security institutions to cooperate and governments at every level to address the local conditions that allow criminality to flourish. We expect properly equipped and motivated personnel, accountable policing, secure borders and justice that is sufficiently swift to discourage crime. We do not expect the details of every security operation to be announced at a press conference. But we expect measurable improvement in whether Nigerians can travel, work, farm, worship and sleep without fear. We cannot continue to measure security by the number of

high-level meetings held after each tragedy. A meeting is an activity. Safety is the result. We Want an Economy That Rewards Work. Nigerians are hardworking. What many lack is not enterprise, imagination or endurance. It is an economy in which honest effort can produce a decent life. We want economic policies that make production easier, employment more plentiful and the cost of living more bearable. We want a stable currency, manageable inflation and access to credit at terms that do not turn every business loan into a farewell ceremony. We accept that reforms are sometimes necessary. We also understand that difficult decisions cannot always be postponed. But reform must not become a fine word used to describe hardship without protection. When government asks citizens to make sacrifices, it must explain the destination, the duration and how the burden will be shared. Sacrifice



cannot remain the permanent occupation of the poor while public officials continue as though austerity were something that happened to other people. We want fiscal discipline, not merely larger budgets. We want borrowing tied to productive investment and a credible capacity to repay. We want public expenditure that produces visible public value. The size of a budget does not impress the family whose child still studies under a leaking roof. Money appropriated is not the same as service delivered. We Want Electricity to Become Ordinary. Electricity should no longer be treated as an occasional government achievement worthy of national celebration. In functioning societies, people switch on a light and continue with their lives. We want a power system that serves homes, farms, schools, hospitals and businesses reliably. We expect governments to complete reforms, improve transmission and distribution, encourage investment and expand access to cleaner and more affordable energy. We recognize that reliable electricity must be paid for. But citizens who pay must receive power, consumers must be properly metered and vulnerable households must be protected transparently. We have spent too many years discussing megawatts while families count hours of darkness. We want the conversation to move from electricity generated in official statements to electricity delivered through actual sockets.

We Want Education That Produces Learning.

Every Nigerian child deserves a genuine education, irrespective of birthplace, family income, gender or disability. We do not want children merely registered in schools. We want them taught. At the end of their education, they should be able to read, reason, calculate, communicate and participate productively in society. Teachers must be trained, respected, supported and held accountable. Schools must be safe and properly equipped. Technical and vocational education must cease to be treated as the waiting room for those considered insufficiently academic. A country requires technicians, builders, mechanics, farmers, designers and craftspeople no less than it require lawyers and administrators. Our universities and other tertiary institutions should produce knowledge, enterprise and solutions—not graduates trained mainly to wait for vacancies in government. Education must also cultivate character. A nation cannot educate the mind and abandon the conscience. Certificates without competence are dangerous; qualifications without integrity may be even more expensive.

We Want Healthcare That Works Before the Emergency.

No Nigerian should have to conduct a fundraising campaign before receiving urgent medical attention. We want primary healthcare centres that open their doors, contain essential medicines and employ qualified personnel. We want hospitals with functioning equipment, reliable power, emergency services and

accountable management. Government officials entrusted with improving public hospitals should not demonstrate their confidence in those hospitals only during commissioning ceremonies. Our healthcare system must emphasize prevention, maternal and child health, immunization, nutrition, mental health and affordable insurance. Doctors, nurses and other health professionals must be treated well enough to remain in the country, while being held to the standards their calling demands. A nation is not truly wealthy if survival depends upon personal connections or the ability to purchase a plane ticket.

We Want Jobs, Not Employment Statistics Alone.

Our young people do not need sympathy speeches. They need opportunities. We want governments to create the conditions in which businesses can start, survive, grow and employ. This requires infrastructure, affordable finance, dependable rules, relevant skills and a tax system that does not pursue small businesses with greater determination than it pursues large-scale waste. Government does not have to employ everyone. It must, however, avoid making it unnecessarily difficult for everyone else to employ anyone. Agriculture should become a profitable commercial activity rather than an annual ceremony involving photographs of officials holding hoes. Farmers need secure land, improved inputs, extension services, storage, irrigation, processing facilities and roads to markets. Industrial policy should support sectors in which Nigeria can produce competitively, create jobs and earn foreign exchange. We cannot build prosperity by importing nearly everything, exporting mainly raw materials and holding conferences on diversification. We want an economy in which young Nigerians can imagine a future without first imagining an airport departure lounge.

We Want Infrastructure That Connects Nigerians.

We want roads that survive more than one rainy season, railways that move people and goods, ports that facilitate trade and digital infrastructure that expands opportunity. Projects must be chosen for their economic and social value, not merely for their political visibility. Maintenance should become part of governance. A country that continually commissions new assets while allowing existing ones to decay is attempting to fill a basket without first checking the bottom. Public projects must also be completed. Nigeria is dotted with abandoned contracts, some old enough to have acquired historical significance. Citizens should be able to see who awarded each major project, how much it costs, when it should be completed and what progress has been made.

A foundation stone is not infrastructure. Neither is a signboard.

We Want Government Money Treated as Our Money. Public money belongs to the public. We want budgets that ordinary citizens can understand, procurement that can withstand scrutiny and audit findings that lead to

consequences. Revenue must be collected fairly and spent prudently. We want to know not only how much government has spent, but what the expenditure has achieved. The purpose of public finance is not to move figures successfully from one column to another. It is to convert national resources into public value. Public officials must understand that government money is not money without an owner. It belongs to the teacher awaiting a classroom, the patient needing medicine, the community needing water and the motorist paying repeatedly for repairs caused by a failed road. Corruption is not merely the stealing of money. It is the stealing of schools, hospitals, security, opportunities and sometimes lives. We therefore demand independent institutions, transparent asset declarations, effective legislative oversight and equal enforcement of the law. Anti-corruption must not become a weapon reserved for opponents or a deterrent available to new political allies.

We Want Institutions Stronger Than Individuals.

Nigeria must be governed by laws, not moods. We want institutions that function regardless of who occupy office. Rules should not be rewritten to suit friends, suspended to punish opponents or rediscovered only when convenient. Appointments must reflect competence, integrity, inclusion and the constitutional character of the federation. Public institutions cannot deliver excellence if leadership positions are distributed principally as rewards for political loyalty. We want an independent judiciary that delivers justice promptly. Justice delayed for decades is not patience; it is institutional failure. We want a professional civil service that provides continuity, remembers what previous governments attempted and is willing to tell political leaders the truth. Every administration should not have to rediscover Nigeria from the beginning.

We Want Leaders Who Unite Rather Than Exploit. Nigeria's diversity should be an asset, not an arsenal

stored for election season. We reject leaders who seek power by deepening ethnic, religious or regional suspicion. Any candidate whose only route to victory is to make one group afraid of another is applying to govern a country he is helping to weaken. We want leadership that gives every Nigerian a sense of belonging. Inclusion is not simply a matter of distributing appointments among geographical zones. It means ensuring that no child's prospects are limited by birthplace, gender, faith, ethnicity or family circumstances. We do not require our leaders to agree with everyone. We require them to recognize that political opponents remain citizens and that disagreement is not treason.

Campaigns end. Nigeria must continue.

We Want Every Level of Government to Do Its Own Work. Our demands must be directed to the proper offices. The President must provide national leadership on security, the economy, infrastructure, foreign affairs and federal institutions. Governors must accept responsibility for education, healthcare, agriculture, urban management, state infrastructure and economic development. The constitutional autonomy of a state cannot be remembered only when federal allocations arrive and forgotten whenever citizens ask questions.

Local governments must provide visible services within their communities:

sanitation, primary healthcare, local roads, markets, water and other basic amenities. Local government cannot remain the level of government closest to the people only in constitutional textbooks. Legislators must make laws, represent citizens and oversee the executive. We shall judge them by the quality of legislation, the seriousness of oversight and the fidelity with which they defend the public interest—not principally by how many motorcycles, grinding machines or bags of fertilizer they distribute. Citizens deserve to know who is responsible for what. Accountability becomes a game of hide-and-seek when every officeholder can blame another level of government. Tell Us How, Not Only What. We have heard many promises. We now require plans. Do not merely promise jobs; tell us which sectors will produce them. Do not merely promise security; explain the institutional changes you will make. Do not merely promise free services; tell us who will pay, what they will cost and how quality will be maintained. Do not merely promise to fight corruption; tell us what systems will prevent it—including corruption committed by members of your own party. Give us priorities, timelines and measurable targets. Tell us what you will do first, what may take longer and what trade-offs will be required. Any candidate promising lower taxes, higher wages, cheaper fuel, free education, free healthcare, constant electricity and massive infrastructure all at once should also introduce us to the arithmetic performing these miracles.

We do not expect perfection. We expect honesty, competence and progress. Public Office Is a Trust. We

reject the idea that public office is a reward for political perseverance, family inheritance or compensation for financing an election. It is a temporary assignment issued by citizens, financed by citizens and revocable by citizens. We want leaders who understand that power is borrowed. Convoys, sirens, security escorts and official residences may create the impression of ownership, but they are accessories of an office that must eventually be surrendered. Leadership must therefore be judged by service, not ceremony; results, not rhetoric; and institutions strengthened, not personalities glorified. A leader should leave office having made government more capable, citizens more hopeful and the next administration less dependent on starting again.

Our Own Covenant as Citizens.

We cannot present demands to politicians without accepting responsibilities ourselves. We shall not demand honest leaders while celebrating unexplained wealth. We shall not complain about bad government and then exchange our votes for gifts unlikely to survive the weekend. We shall resist ethnic and religious manipulation. We shall disagree without dehumanizing one another. We shall pay lawful taxes, protect public property, obey legitimate rules and demand accountability based on facts rather than party loyalty. We shall remember that a politician we admire can be wrong and one we dislike can occasionally be right. We shall not expect government to perform every civic duty on our behalf. Families must nurture character, communities must protect common values, businesses must treat workers and customers fairly, and citizens must participate beyond election day. Democracy cannot be sustained by spectators.

Before You Ask for Our Votes.

To everyone seeking public office, our position is simple. Do not ask first where we come from, how we worship or which party we supported previously. Tell us how you will protect our lives, expand our opportunities and manage our common resources. Do not merely tell us that you love Nigeria. Love expressed through competent service will be sufficient. Do not ask us to lower our expectations because previous governments also failed. The continuity of failure does not convert it into a national tradition. Do not treat criticism as hostility. Citizens who ask difficult questions are not enemies of government; they are participants in democracy. Do not promise us paradise. Give us a country that works. We want a Nigeria where effort has a fair

chance of becoming achievement; where children can dream beyond the circumstances of their birth; where disagreement does not threaten belonging; and where public institutions serve citizens without first demanding influence, connections or inducement. We want leadership that is honest about difficulties, disciplined in spending, courageous in reform and humane in distributing its consequences.



candidates may change. Political parties may rise, merge, divide or acquire new slogans. Campaign colours may be repainted and yesterday's opponents may become tomorrow's allies with the speed for which Nigerian politics is justly famous. But the terms of citizenship must endure. The country belongs neither to the government of the day nor to the politicians seeking to replace it. Nigeria belongs equally to all its citizens, including those not yet born who will inherit the consequences of today's choices. So, before you ask for our votes, read our manifesto. Tell us what you accept. Tell us how you will deliver it. Tell us how we shall measure your performance. Then ask for our mandate. This time, you may bring the promises. We are bringing the terms.

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