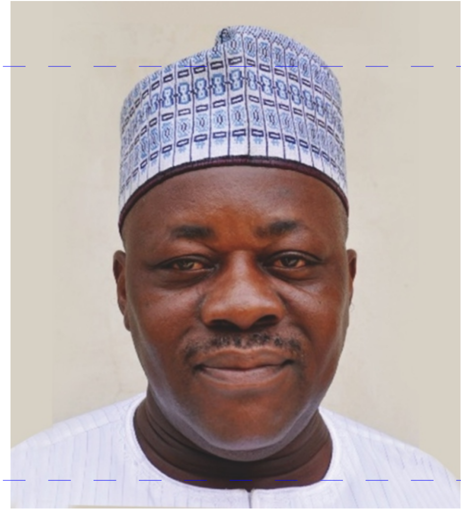
"Success" and the Tinubu Reforms

By Jibrin Ibrahim



The general verdict of the Nigerian people has been that the reform package of the Tinubu Administration has been a failure. The evidence for this is that virtually every Nigerian has been consistent in saying that the quality of their lives has deteriorated since the administration came into office. They cite the huge escalation of the cost of living due to hyper-inflation. They talk about the sordid daily drama they encounter because accessing healthcare, education for their children and even food for the family have become a major challenge. This is summed up in the often repeated phrase that the middle class has been wiped out. IMF Data shows that Nigeria's GDP per capita declined from $3,022 in 2014 to just $835.49 in 2024, signaling a sharp contraction in the average economic output per person. The country's total Gross Domestic Product—the overall value of goods and services produced—also fell steeply, from $568.5bn recorded in 2014 to $194.96bn in 2024, marking a staggering 65.71 per cent decline over the period. The result is that Nigeria's economic position in Africa collapsed from the first to the fourth.

The response of President Bola Tinubu Administration has been to say that the reality is that Government has "implemented bold and difficult reforms that have dismantled longstanding distortions in our economy and restored policy credibility." This was the declaration he made while addressing members of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) on Tuesday. The very things Nigerians have been complaining about such as the removal of petrol subsidies, the floating of the naira and the increase in electricity tariff for consumers have repositioned the economy for rapid growth said the President. He expressed the belief that his administration's "Renewed Hope Agenda remains focused on achieving a $1 trillion economy by the year 2030." He also told the Nation that the positive effects have enhanced economic resilience, restored macroeconomic stability, and led to the creation of a transparent and competitive business environment, and the enhancement of investor confidence in the economy. He then announced that our economy is now better positioned to attract both domestic and foreign private investment, which is critical to stimulating sustained growth, creating decent jobs, and lifting millions of Nigerians out of poverty.

Maybe Tinubu is right, our economic problems have been solved and in the long run the positives will start manifesting themselves. As John Maynard Keynes, the economics guru once said however, the long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run, we are all dead. President Tinubu has to learn to speak about the current realities Nigerians are living in. There is hunger, deprivation and anger in the land. The path of development for the government is steadily increasing the taxes Nigerians are subjected too. What Nigerians see is a policy commitment to harsh neoliberal policies that are deepening poverty and increasing misery.

The problems that Nigerians see is that there is a massive growth of public corruption and the power elite has been using government resources to enrich themselves. So those in power are the only ones getting richer. At the same time, the next phase of economic reform appears to be the accelerated privatization of the Nation's economic assets. The writing Nigerians are reading on the wall is that the direction of travel is ensuring mass poverty and hunger, while the ruling class takes over our key national assets. The future can only be about looting, pillage and plunder. That is the path to disaster.

The Tinubu Administration should pause and reflect on two things, the social and political implications of their policy agenda and what should successful reform deliver to the ordinary Nigerian. The deepening of poverty and deprivation can lead to major upheaval in the short run. Rather than create fantasies about the long run they alone can see, they should seriously consider the possibility of social and political upheaval from an over-abused population that sees no positive future. The objective conditions for such an outcome exist already. As for the subjective conditions, we are yet to see its contours but just the possibility of its occurrence should provoke deep reflections in government.

Finally, the government needs deep reflection of the definition of successful reform. For a society in deep poverty and misery, success cannot be just pleasing the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It has to be about making life better for ordinary people. Drastically reducing incomes and dramatically increasing taxes can only be the path to disaster. There is a limit to which you can lie about success because of the simple reason that the people are living in today's economic reality.