

Nigeria at 60

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A new generation demands change

Young Nigerians are holding government to account on a string of failures. By David Pilling

Sixty years ago this month, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became the first prime minister of an independent Nigeria. The population was 45m, Lagos was the capital and Nigeria was pumping a mere 45,000 barrels of oil a day. The Nigerian pound, which remained the currency until it gave way to the naira in 1973, carried a picture of Queen Elizabeth II, monarch of Britain, the departing colonial power.

Much has changed since then. Nigeria's population has more than quadrupled to 206m, the capital is Abuja and the treasury is hooked on revenue from the 2m barrels of sweet crude oil the country produces each day.

Nigeria now has a US presidential system rather than the parliamentary one it inherited from Britain. No longer are there three administrative regions, representing the largest Igbo, Fulani-Hausa and Yoruba communities in a country of 250 ethnic groups and 500 languages. Instead Nigeria is subdivided into 36 states, many virtually bankrupt, and one federal territory that holds the purse strings.

After three decades of near-successive, mostly ruinous, military dictatorships in which generals grabbed power, democracy has held for 21 years.

Seen by many as the country's most important postcolonial achievement, democracy brings the prospect, if not yet the reality, of a government more accountable to its people's pressing



High hopes: Nigeria's first prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, steps off a maiden flight, 1958; demonstrations in Lagos this month — Getty/Reuters



needs. Protests that erupted across the country this month against police brutality were also an expression of a deeper frustration with authority, especially from young people.

"Democracy brought voice to Nigeria," says Amina Mohammed, deputy secretary-general of the UN and one of many Nigerians to have scaled the heights of international diplomacy. "Democracy also brought hope, and with hope came a clear view of the possibilities." For tens of millions of Nigerians living below \$1.90 a day, hope is all there

is. As bad as state violence is the lack of opportunity.

Nigeria's leaders have largely failed to provide the public goods that could help unleash the people's potential, says Ms Mohammed.

"Basic service delivery on education, health, water and sanitation have not reached millions of Nigerians, especially women and girls. This has made the foundation of our home weak."

Millions of girls receive little or no education, especially in the north, where many are married off early.

Throughout all the ups and downs of a political system that historian Max Siolun describes as "a cut-throat Game of Thrones", one thing has stayed more or less constant: Nigeria's borders.

Despite the attempted secession of Biafra in 1967 and continued tension between the three main regions — each of which feels marginalised or aggrieved — the country cobbled together by British imperialism has stayed largely intact. More, it has forged a genuine national identity stronger than the centrifugal forces threatening to pull it

apart. Still tensions are very much alive, both in the scramble for resources between states as well as in conflicts caused by the militant Islamists of Boko Haram in the north-east, militancy in the oil-rich Delta, and clashes between herders and settled farmers.

"We can't figure out how Nigeria should be, how the parts should relate to the whole," says Wole Soyinka, the playwright, poet and Nobel laureate.

If democracy is entrenched, the regular exercises in voting — lubricated by

Continued on page 2

Inside

Past, present, future

Bright lights on a nation's biggest achievements and disappointments

Page 4

'No fresh ideas to stop the violence'

How an insurgency problem became a crisis for security forces

Page 7

Recession returns

Pandemic and protests lead to dire economic forecasts. What happens now?

Page 14

Music superstars take on the world

An international cultural phenomenon, from Fela Kuti to Burna Boy

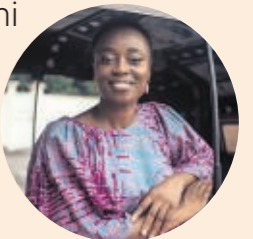
Page 6

'My country's founding principles are under attack'

Novelist Adaobi Nwaubani

on fragile unity

Page 6



WHAT CANNOT BE DONE IS WHAT WE MUST DO

Whilst the world is still reeling from the double blow of the pandemic and low commodity prices; Africa which for years has had the burden of playing catch up has a new challenge – the fear of the gains of the last few years being eradicated.

The pandemic has emphasized the need to have a resilient economy, and as such a diversified economy. For a mono-product economy such as ours, the actualization of our diversification agenda is hinged on a facilitator, oil. At Oando, our belief is that we must focus on optimizing the value of the oil and gas industry, so it returns the revenue required for the economy's diversification.

As a company we are guided by the consciousness that we are far from ordinary, our mission has always been to change Nigeria's narrative by championing the solutions to our nation's unique challenges. We have a track record of audacity, consistently using oil and gas as a lever to prosper industry and in turn the nation; from being the first private sector company to pioneer the development of Nigeria's foremost natural gas distribution network, today the largest private sector gas distributor in Nigeria; to conceiving and building West Africa's first privately-owned midstream jetty saving the sector approximately \$120 million annually.

With the understanding that access to energy is a pre-requisite of economic and social development, we have contributed towards the Government's efforts to exploit the country's gas reserves to power the nation. Through projects such as the 7 Critical Gas Development Projects (7CGDPs) which are designed to unlock circa 42 trillion cubic feet of gas thus acting as an enabler to spur the industrialization of Nigeria. Oando is the only indigenous company that is a part of this initiative by virtue of the NAOC Joint Venture (JV) responsible for unlocking almost 50% of the 42 trillion cubic feet that the 7 CGDPs aims to deliver. Also, via the NAOC JV we are the only indigenous company party to a total supply obligation of 850MMscf for Trains 1-6 making us the second largest supplier to the NLNG; when Train 7 comes on stream in 2024 this supply obligation will increase to 1.1Bcf.

We have always played a part in the growth and development of Nigeria, so even though the narrative may say the future of oil is bleak, we are not deterred from our ambition. We believe oil will be the game-changer for the nation. As Nigeria evolves into the country we all desire, we are proactively putting in place a framework that secures our future – one that ensures we continue to have a sustainable business model to attract the right investment. We have a diverse portfolio of assets across exploration and production; with still so much of Nigeria's bounty of natural resources untapped we continue to look for new opportunities in resource extraction.

We have also started making inroads into renewables ensuring that we have a forward-looking energy mix and at the same time are reducing our carbon footprint. An inclusive and indigenous workforce is at the heart of our operations, we continue to invest in the best talent, recruiting, training and retaining the brightest Nigerian minds.

The effort of diversifying the economy would be futile if we left anyone behind. Via our NAOC JV social impact projects we remain an integral part of the communities we operate in, to date we have invested over \$130 million in education, implemented over 340 infrastructural projects, supported 400 communities and positively impacted 12 million lives.

It would be foolhardy to speak of the work we do within our communities and the nation at large without speaking to the most glaring challenge of our times, the COVID-19 pandemic. The private sector has risen to the occasion in support of the Government's COVID-19 containment efforts. Specifically, within the oil and gas sector we, alongside 32 Upstream companies, led by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) contributed \$30million to aid the Nigerian Government in their fight to contain the spread of COVID-19.

At the peak of the pandemic, Oando employees set up an initiative called 'The Aggregator Platform' (TAP) with a commitment to support efforts to eradicate hunger across the country one state at a time. TAP allows us to connect donors with boots-on-the-ground; it is an initiative that is true to our belief that we as a people can be our own solution providers. The initiative has seen us move outside our sphere of expertise to use our resources and influence to support the actualization of SDG2. Feeding people is not an end solution; empowering people plays a more dominant role in accelerating our economy. Through our independent charity Oando Foundation we are actively working to bridge the gap in the Nigerian educational system via a holistic approach that includes adopting schools, infrastructural build and teacher training to name a few.

We are building the next generation of change makers

and creating a myriad of employment opportunities that ensures no one is left behind in the diversification agenda.

Africa is indeed the last frontier and we are proud to be African.

Irrespective of Africa's challenges, we are excited by what the future holds for us as a company, nation and continent.

We are Nigeria. We are Oando