

Why Projects Fail or Succeed - A Project Management Preview of the Nigerian General Elections 2015

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Nigeria has planned to conduct general elections, in February 2015, comprising the presidential election, governorship elections, senatorial elections, elections to the House of Representatives and State House of Assembly. The event, General Elections 2015, constitutes a major project with defined objectives, specified dates for execution and allocated budget. Given the many challenges that impact on the country such as insecurity and destruction of lives and properties by the Boko Haram, problems in the economy, corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, political instability fuelled by the dubious utterances and questionable activities of some top politicians, etc., it is little wonder that all Nigerians should be praying that the project will succeed.

Normally, a project is successful if it is completed on time, within budget and most importantly achieves its objectives. The success of the Nigerian General Election project transcends such factors as time and cost to issues of scope and quality. The focus on scope in this case is on the achievement of the project's objectives. Success is not and cannot be limited to the physical execution of the process of an election and the declaration of one of the contestants as a winner. No, it is what happens during and after the elections that will determine the success of the project. For example in the presidential election, one would suggest that it is not just that the current president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, wins the election and continues in office or that his opponent, Major General Muhammadu Buhari, wins and comes into office.

This is not correct; success in the project should be the establishment and sustenance of a government that, among other things, will engender peace and harmony in the country. It is relevant to underscore the point that elections are not just conducted at intervals in order to conform to agreed time table. It should be more important than a routine adherence to a plan. Rather, a national general election should be seen as a tool for national political, social and economic development. It should provide an opportunity for national reassessment. It should give the people the freedom hopefully, to elect a government of persons with ideas and commitment that will help the nation make progress in its areas of deficiencies. In particular for our country Nigeria, such a government should fulfil major critical success factors that address the various challenges which impact on the stability, integrity, political and economic development of the Nigerian nation. In line with this reasoning, it is relevant to suggest and examine the Critical Success Factors for the General Election 2015. These are factors that should be achieved for success of the elections.

Critical Success Factors for the General Election 2015

The suggested conditions for success in the General Elections could be summarised as the achievement of the following:

- Free and fair elections, peace and harmony in the land after the General Elections

- A complete elimination of the unbridled killings, kidnapping and collateral destruction of facilities by the Boko Haram.
- Stopping other kidnapping cases and insecurity including the seemingly resolved militancy in the Niger Delta.
- National Security, Sanctity of Human Lives, Patriotism, Boko Haram and National Unity
- Minimising “political industry” and political “thuggery”
- Curbing Institutionalised corruption
- Necessity for Continual Political Development of the Country – Implementing the Report of the National Conference 2014

In the next paragraphs, these conditions are reviewed with a statement of the risks associated with each of them.

Free and fair elections, peace and harmony in the land after the General Elections

Political crisis generated before and after elections has led to major national upheavals such as the first military coup, national instability, widespread killings and then the tragic civil war. Sadly our politicians see the elections as a do-or-die and life-and-death affair. As a result, campaigns and conduct of elections are characterised by violence, destruction of lives and property, conflicts, assassination of opponents and innocent victims, and reportedly rigging of election results. In addition, probably within the past ten years, every major election has been followed by a protracted court case that could go through all the major courts in the country for years until it is resolved by the highest court, the Supreme Court. The result of this is that the winners cannot settle in to work and deliver on their promises as they are hounded by the losers. In the long run, the nation becomes the loser as every important affair of the state is kept waiting until the protracted litigations are concluded some two years after. In 2015, Nigerians hope for an election that the outcome will be accepted by all the parties without any cry of foul play and rigging.

However, there are security challenges that could exist in the upcoming general elections because of the activities of the Boko Haram. For example, how will the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conduct elections in the volatile North-East States in the face of the lingering Boko Haram challenge? The Boko Haram insurgency and the state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe could affect voting in parts of those north-eastern states. If this occurs, the main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) could lose a significant number of votes. This might be ground to reject the result of the presidential election and question the legitimacy of the elected government. An election not held in all States may also fall short of the constitutional requirements for electing a president, namely that the winner should score 25 % of the votes in two-thirds of the 36 States, thereby providing grounds for serious legal disputes.

Eliminating the Boko Haram and their unbridled killings, kidnapping and collateral destruction of facilities

The deadly activities of this group have led to the death of thousands of our nationals. The kidnapping of the school girls at the Chibok secondary school in April 2014, many other kidnap cases, and the destruction of lives and properties in villages, towns and cities almost every week have become probably the only news item that regularly makes the headlines about Nigeria to the outside world. All the achievements of the current Federal Government have been negated and neutralised as the dastardly destruction of lives and facilities by Boko Haram take the focus whenever Nigeria is talked about. It is sadly a problem that has so far defied resolution.

It is a major blot on the current government and indeed could seriously count against the chances of success of President Goodluck Jonathan in the election. It is also the case that the APC is promising that if their presidential candidate, General Buhari, wins the election, the Boko Haram problem will be resolved. General Buhari himself says that he will stop it if elected [1].

However, should such a critical national security issue be left to the vagaries and machinations of partisan politics? This question will be addressed later in this paper.

Stopping other kidnapping cases and insecurity including the seemingly resolved militancy in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta militants caused much destruction of lives and facilities especially oil facilities for some years, 2004 to about 2010. They were a major source of national instability socially, politically and economically until the Federal Government reached a peaceful settlement with them.

However, if President Goodluck Jonathan loses the presidential election because the country was made “ungovernable” as a result of the destructive activities of the Boko Haram, it will be overly optimistic to assume that the Niger Delta militants will remain peaceful if and when General Buhari will become president. It is probably the case that if Buhari takes over and resolves the Boko Haram problem as he and his party members have been promising, the Niger Delta militants may take up arms and resume hostilities and destruction and also make the country “ungovernable”. In that scenario, Nigeria will be the loser as the country will know no peace. All that the elections will have achieved could be to decommission the Boko Haram and “re-commission” the Niger Delta militants.

As this piece was being written, the author came across the news item in which a retired general was suggesting the arrest of some militants from Niger Delta area who promised problems for the nation if President Goodluck Jonathan loses the presidential election [2].

National Security, Sanctity of Human Lives, Patriotism, Boko Haram and National Unity

On January 11, 2015, more than 40 world leaders and huge crowds numbering about two million joined the unity march in Paris after 17 people were killed during three days of attacks by terrorists. The marchers including the French government and opposition leaders demonstrated national unity after the attacks on satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, police officers, and a kosher supermarket. The world leaders, included British Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas all participated in the march.

Every Nigerian who watched this on the television, should have wept. For 17 persons, Europe virtually stood still but thousands of Nigerians have been killed and continue to be killed weekly; yet both in Nigeria and outside the country, life continues as the deaths do not matter. While in France, the opposition and the government closed ranks to tackle a threat to national security; in Nigeria, our politicians use the Boko Haram atrocities as a tool for electioneering. What is worse? The accusations have been traded for many months, if not years, that some highly placed Nigerians sponsor and encourage the Boko Haram. Where is our patriotism if thousands of Nigerian lives have to be sacrificed weekly for political expediency? National security whether from the Boko Haram or the Niger Delta Militants should not be an issue for partisan politics rather all Nigerians irrespective of ethnicity, religious and political persuasion need to close ranks and rid the nation of such a menace.

Today, Friday, January 30th, the African Union is urging a regional intervention into the Boko Haram problem. The African Union Commission Chief, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, has called for a regional five-nation force of 7,500 troops to defeat the "horrendous" rise of the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram. The statement on Friday was made as Boko Haram increased cross border raids in recent weeks, in neighbouring countries such as Cameroon and Chad, as it continued to take over more territory in Nigeria.

"Boko Haram's horrendous abuses, unspeakable cruelty, total disregard for human lives, and wanton destruction of property are unmatched," Dlamini-Zuma said in a statement after the AU's Peace and Security Council met late Thursday, ahead of a full AU summit meeting on Friday.

The Boko Haram uprising has become a regional crisis, with the four directly affected countries - Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria - agreeing along with Benin to boost cooperation to contain the threat and to form a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

"I am deeply concerned by the prevailing situation as a result of Boko Haram terrorist activities, including the recent escalation of violence witnessed on the ground," Dlamini-Zuma said after the meeting at AU headquarters in the Ethiopian capital, where the two-day annual summit of the 54-nation bloc is slated to be held.

"The continued attacks in northeastern Nigeria and the increasing attacks in the Lake Chad Basin, along the border with Chad and Cameroon, and in the northern provinces of that country, have the potential of destabilising the entire region, with far-reaching security and humanitarian consequences."

More than 13,000 people have been killed and about one million made homeless by Boko Haram violence since 2009 [3].

'Continental problem'

Chad's President Idriss Deby, who had earlier this month sent a convoy of troops and 400 military vehicles into neighbouring Cameroon to fight Boko Haram, said action had to be taken. "We have seen too many meetings and no concrete action."

"Today, there are four countries affected by Boko Haram, but tomorrow it may be a continental problem," he continued.

Earlier this month Nigerian security officials ruled out the need for a United Nations or African Union-backed force to fight Boko Haram, saying the country and its partners could handle the threat. But international pressure has increased, with a top US military commander General David Rodriguez, head of US Africa Command, warning this week that tackling Boko Haram will need a "huge" international effort [3].

Necessity for an Urgent Realistic and Pragmatic Solution of the Boko Haram Problem

Sadly, it appears that as a country, we are still turning down offers for assistance to help resolve the Boko Haram problem. What is worse is that even as a people we are not united. The political parties are not working together to resolve the problem. They are still blaming one another. It appears that their overriding interest is to remain in power for those in the government or to win power for those in the opposition irrespective of what is happening to our people. It is a sorry case of a house divided against itself. Meanwhile, the Boko Haram troops are running rampage; killing our people and destroying our towns and villages.

Suggestions on Way Forward

- If it is still feasible, the elections should be shelved for some years, until the Boko Haram and other security problems, including the Niger Delta militancy, will be resolved.
- A government of national unity should be formed instead of the February 14th elections.
- A multinational task force as proposed by the AU should be assigned to the task of eliminating once and for all time the Boko Haram menace.

- The government of national unity should restore peace and harmony to the country. The sanctity of human lives and deliberate efforts to secure the life of Nigerians, whether they are in Maiduguri, Jos, Port Harcourt, Abuja or Lagos should be the priority in our national governance.

Curbing Institutionalised Corruption

Corruption is said to be one of the reasons for the failure to eliminate the Bok Haram. General Buhari reportedly told the US Secretary of State Kerry that the government once scuttled a hearing by the National Assembly on defence spending [1].

"Buhari said when the National Assembly set up a hearing with the heads of security agencies to know how the defence budgets were being spent, the Presidency scuttled it because it was obvious that the money for equipment was not being spent judiciously. He said by such an act, the Jonathan government was not encouraging transparency in the way and manner money meant for security was being spent."

He was said to have promised that transparency would be his watchword in the disbursement of defence budgets. He "promised to ensure that every kobo spent on security would be accounted for as this would ensure that our soldiers get the appropriate equipment and have their morale boosted."

Corruption is also responsible for the poor distribution of wealth in the country to minimise hunger and suffering. Nigeria has a three-tier government structure namely: federal, state and local governments. Each Nigerian living in the city, town or village is supposed to belong to a local government which caters for their local roads, transport, schools, markets, etc. In spite of the development of our economy as now the largest in Africa, many villagers, and some town and city dwellers are suffering from hunger and poverty. This could be directly traceable to the poor performance of the governments of the states and local council.

To eliminate this sad situation, it is necessary that each national political party should be able to monitor and correct the performance of their state governors and local council chairmen. This should ensure that good governance is practised at the grass-root level.

Minimising “political industry” and political “thuggery”

Sadly, our politicians have made politics an industry for accumulating wealth by hook or crook. Many politicians are notorious at amassing wealth which is much higher than they can ever make from their normal salaries and allowances. They scheme to perpetuate themselves in office and stop at nothing to achieve their political greed even if it entails shedding of innocent blood. Political alliances are formed to foster and to perpetuate selfish political goals. This has been the characteristic of most Nigerian politicians. Those who are in power are desperate to hold on to it at all cost while those who want to come on board are going about it in a do-or-die manner [4].

As a result of political thuggery which entails destruction of lives and property, our political electioneering is comparable to warfare. Intra-party and inter-party conflicts lead to kidnapping and assassinations of opponents, and official rigging of election results. Use of thugs has become a part of electioneering tool because election is a do-or-die or a life-and-death event. This has given rise to the emergence of terrorist groups which threaten the peace and unity of the country. Examples of this phenomenon include the following [5]:

- A former Governor of Borno State recruited some members of the sect hitherto practicing their faith in relative peace, armed them and mobilized them as thugs to help him win re-election. This was from 2003. Encouraged by the promise they unleashed mayhem on political opponents of the Governor and helped secure second term victory. The Governor, just like his colleagues all over the country reneged on the promises to include them in power sharing. After successful rigging and thuggery operations no effort was made to retrieve the arms from the sect. With excess and idle munitions in the armoury the sect started a series of local attacks until fifth columnists infiltrated their ranks, gave them sophisticated trainings, fundings and intelligence. This is supposed to have given rise to the Boko Haram. Other State Governors did the same in their respective States.
- A Governor of Rivers State reportedly sponsored cults in Rivers state which mushroomed to the Niger Delta Militants.
- A Governor in Enugu State had killer squad in Enugu State that put the fear of hell into people.
- A Governor in Anambra State hired a team that killed the NBA chairman and wife in Anambra State; the public reaction against it cost him the next elections.
- A Governor in Bauchi State had his thugs which he used against opponents in Bauchi State.
- There are some others which have not been mentioned here. It is reported that the use of thugs was the vogue among State Governors, the only difference between them and Borno State was that either the ring leaders were personally settled at the expense of their followers or they were intimidated and blackmailed into submission by security agencies of the various States.

Necessity for Continual Political Development of the Country – Implementing the Report of the National Conference 2014

Chief Reuben Fasanranti, the President of the Yoruba socio-political group Afenifere, has endorsed President Goodluck Jonathan's bid for a second term in office. The endorsement came at a meeting of its members with the President at the residence of Afenifere leader, in Akure on Tuesday, January 27, 2015 [6].

Spokesman for the group, Yinka Odumakin, told reporters after the meeting that the endorsement was predicated on the President's commitment to implementing the recommendations of report of the National Conference 2014. He was also praised for the courage for convening the conference that produced the report.

In a similar vein, on Monday, January 26th, President Jonathan was endorsed by Ohaneze Ndigbo. The Igbo apex ruling body, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, in Awka, the Anambra State Capital, endorsed President Goodluck Jonathan, the People Democratic Party (PDP) standard bearer for the presidential election [7]. Addressing newsmen, the President of Ohanaeze in Anambra State who is also the chairman of Ohanaeze Ndigbo State Presidents Forum, Chris Eluemunoh, said that the seven presidents-general of the seven states that make up the Igbo nation which include, Anambra; Chris Elumunoh, Enugu; Dr Eric Ebeh, Imo; Dr Ezechi Chukwu , Abia; Chief Emmanuel Oparanta, Ebonyi; Pius Nwankwo, Rivers; Prince Igo Okparamma and Delta; Ifeanyichukwu Onwukamike, resolved to endorse him because of the need to implement the national conference recommendations as he was the initiator of the conference that they said, would unite the country .

In a communiqué signed by the seven presidents-general, they stated that since the All Progressive Congress (APC), opted out of the conference, it meant that the initiator, President Jonathan would be voted to implement it. According to them, "considering the realities of the forthcoming 2015 general elections, Ohanaeze Ndigbo State Presidents forum, has objectively made a critical assessment of the scenario and our findings revealed that the implementation of the just concluded National Conference resolutions is both timely and necessary for the sake of equity, fairness and common good of all Nigerians as an entity". The group reasoned that since the conference was the brainchild of President Jonathan, it was then logical and impressive that he would be desirous to implement the said confab resolutions rather than any other candidate.

The point here is that the implementation of the report of the National Conference 2014 is an essential contribution for the peaceful political development of the nation. Much money was invested to assemble representatives of different states in Abuja. They discussed over many weeks and produced a report which they are convinced will enhance fair play, peace and equity in the country. Such a report should be implemented irrespective of who does the implementation.

Conclusive Summary

The whole essence and objectives of elections should be to facilitate political, social and economic development. We make progress as a country when we elect people who can achieve these objectives in order to move the country forward. However, if we choose to elect our kinsmen, tribesmen and are not interested in using the best that our nation can produce, we shall remain perpetually underdeveloped. What is worse? The curse of perpetual underdevelopment will be carried over to our children and future generations. This is the choice before us in elections.

This paper suggests that given the major insecurity that the Boko Haram constitutes in the country, as has been highlighted in the report, it has moved from a national to a regional problem, this should not be the time for us as a people to engage in divisive and hostile party elections. A house divided against itself cannot stand. A national unity government should be constituted to take control of the nation while in the interim, concerted efforts are made with other nations to eliminate the Boko Haram menace. We should also at the same time resolve other security problems in the country, including the Niger Delta Militancy.

There should be a time and place for every event for success. Our analysis suggests that this is not the time for our country to engage in the planned General Elections for us to succeed.

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