

NIGERIA-NETHERLANDS RELATIONS UNDER THE JONATHAN ADMINISTRATION: CRITICAL VISTAS FOR THE NIGERIAN STATE

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ABSTRACT

It is becoming increasingly imperative for Nigeria to deepen and diversify the fundamentals of her foreign relations. The occasion of a visit by the Nigerian President to the Netherlands therefore, attracted this research attention. Accordingly, the general objective of the study is to examine the character of Nigeria-Netherlands relations, under the Jonathan Administration. The specific objectives are to: (i) determine if there is a definable focus for Nigeria-Netherlands relations, under the Jonathan Administration and (ii) recommend ways of improving in a mutually beneficial direction, Nigeria-Netherlands relations, under the Jonathan Administration.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria-Netherlands Relations, Jonathan Administration, the Nigerian State

INTRODUCTION

It is becoming increasingly imperative for Nigeria to deepen and diversify the fundamentals of her foreign relations and the essence of her international cooperation and diplomacy. Hence, President Goodluck Jonathan was recently in The Netherlands for the 2014 Global Nuclear Security Summit and used the occasion of the visit to interface with Nigerian nationals in the host country, as is conventional with visiting presidents. In addition, President Jonathan conducted other diplomatic businesses. According to Abati (2014), President Jonathan joined other world leaders, including President Barrack Obama of the United States, President Francois Hollande of France, Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, at the 2014 Global Nuclear Security Summit which opened at The Hague in Holland, on March 24, 2014. President Jonathan later that day met with the Chief Executive Officer and other high-ranking officials of Shell Petroleum International; the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's largest joint venture partners, which has its Headquarters in the Netherlands. The President was also expected to witness the signing of an investment agreement between Nigeria and Dutch textile giants, Vlisco and meet with Nigerians living in the Netherlands during his visit (Abati, 2014). It was the occasion of this visit that excited the research instincts that led to the current study.

In the context of this study, the Jonathan Administration effectively began when Dr Jonathan was sworn into office for full four-year tenure. Precedent to this period, upon the unfortunate death in office of Nigeria's President Umaru Yar'Adua, the then Vice President Jonathan completed the remaining segment of President Yar'Adua's tenure; before contesting the

presidential election in his own capacity and subsequently emerged victorious. According to the official records of the Nigerian State House (2013), Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was sworn-in on May, 6, 2010 as President, Commander-in-chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, following the passing away of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua on May 5, 2010. On May 29, 2011, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan took oath as President and Commander in Chief, after his victory in the 2011 Presidential election. Since the inception of the Jonathan presidency, it has been for the Nigerian state, a harvest of nation-building difficulties. Indeed, even the best apologists of the Jonathan presidency would easily admit that the Jonathan Administration has been battling with completely unprecedented national challenges that invariably possess immense international trajectories. A detailed discussion of these challenges is conceptually outside the purview of this study. However, it would suffice to remark that the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is one of those unprecedented nation-building challenges of the Nigerian state; under President Jonathan (see Walker, 2012). The Boko Haram insurgency has undoubtedly attracted an unparalleled level of worrisome international attention for the Nigerian State. The occasion of a visit by the Nigerian President to the Netherlands, for a Global (Nuclear) Security Summit therefore, invariably attracted this research attention. Accordingly, the general objective of the study is to examine the character of Nigeria-Netherlands relations under the Jonathan Administration and consider the critical vistas of beneficial relations for the Nigerian side. The specific objectives are therefore, are to: (i) determine if there is a definable focus for Nigeria-Netherlands relations, under the Jonathan Administration and (ii) recommend ways of improving in a mutually beneficial direction, Nigeria-Netherlands relations, under the embattled Jonathan Administration

NIGERIA-NETHERLANDS DIPLOMACY UNDER THE JONATHAN ADMINISTRATION

Indeed, the Government of the Netherlands (n.d) describes Netherlands-Nigeria relations as follows: Nigeria is a major trading partner of the Netherlands. The Netherlands is one of the largest European investors in Nigeria, and Nigeria, is the Netherlands' main trading partner in Africa. Under Political relations the Netherlands has an embassy in the Nigerian capital Abuja. There is a trade office in Lagos, which falls under the economic section of the embassy in Abuja. The Nigerian embassy is also located in The Hague. The Netherlands and the European Union have regular dialogue with the Nigerian authorities, focusing on economic issues, agriculture and energy (oil and gas extraction), peace and security (Nigeria's role in the region), law enforcement (human trafficking), counterterrorism, human rights (freedom of religion), the environment, migration and good governance. The embassy in Abuja focuses primarily on energy supply security, supporting the Dutch business community, combating illegal migration, and promoting human rights and good governance. As a Permanent Representation, the embassy is also responsible for contacts with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). On Economic relations, the Netherlands is one of Nigeria's largest European investors. Dutch oil companies are important for oil and gas extraction in Nigeria. Dutch businesses are also successful in the retail, food and hydraulic engineering sectors. Small, specialized Dutch firms are active in the energy, agricultural trade and service sectors. There are as yet unexploited opportunities for Dutch companies in supplying the oil and gas sectors, financial services, agricultural and horticulture, water management, telecommunications and infrastructure. The Netherlands' main import from Nigeria is crude oil. The Nigerian Netherlands Chamber of Commerce is based in Lagos, the largest city. The Chamber supports Dutch businesses in Nigeria. Furthermore on development relationship, The Netherlands does not have a structural development cooperation relationship with Nigeria. The Netherlands spent

an estimated € 1.3 million in Nigeria in 2012 through the Human Rights Fund, which supports initiatives that protect human rights and fight corruption (Government of Netherlands, n.d).

As a matter of fact, Nigeria-Netherlands relations have witnessed a series of diplomatic visits and reciprocal diplomatic visits, under the Jonathan Administration. The Nigerian Minister of Agriculture visited the Netherlands in 2011. Nigerian senior civil servants visited in 2012. The Dutch Human Rights Ambassador visited Nigeria in May 2012 (Government of Netherlands, n.d). The Nigerian Ambassador to the Netherlands, Dr. Nimota Akanbi, has also led many foreign missions to Nigeria (Aderanti, 2012). Consequently, among the most recent developments in Nigeria-Netherlands relations was the signing in March 2014 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries, on immigration matters. The MoU deals with cooperation in combating irregular migration, human trafficking, readmission and reintegration of returnees, return assistance, document fraud detection, capacity building, identification and repatriation (Andrews, 2014)

NIGERIA-NETHERLANDS EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

There is a noteworthy educational vista to Nigeria-Netherlands relations. For instance, the Business School Netherlands Nigeria (BSNN) was established in Nigeria, in October 2003 as an educational service provider. This business school is believed to be rigorously utilizing a scientific learning methodology termed Action Learning. The intent of Action Learning is to contribute to higher education in management learning; and facilitate the development of African managers' skills, knowledge, research capabilities and ability to take action with regards to the problems, prospects and challenges facing their own organizations. The programmes offered by Business School Netherlands Nigeria, carry the intrinsic character of the Action Learning methodology and this has proven to be one of the critical factors resulting in the business school's current position in Nigeria, as a leading provider of MBA studies, recognized in Europe and with a highly relevant approach to effective management development. To date, BSNN has twenty-three sets of MBA students in Ota and Abuja and over 400 participants on the 2 or 3-day Action learning Management Development Programmes (Also known as Masters' Classes) and over 14 students on the 6-month Management Competence Development Programme (BSNN, 2014).

There is also the technical matters collaboration between CITO - a Netherlands examination body and Nigeria's Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) towards the conduct of computer based tests by JAMB. There are hardly other collaborations between Nigeria and the Netherlands, in the field of education. The following excerpts are taken from Butterman, et al, (2007):

Dutch universities have a long academic tradition. The first was founded in Leiden by Prince William of Orange in 1575. Dutch university education and research is not only qualitatively high standard but also very internationally oriented. All the universities are represented in international networks and work together with other universities from around the world. What the Netherlands has to offer - what makes it unique - is the emphasis placed on educational differentiation, international classrooms, research-based education and learning environments that are devoted to critical thinking. The university colleges, graduate schools and tenure track programmes of the Netherlands attract talented Dutch and international students and academics. The universities' centres of excellence; focus on

highly specialized fundamental research. Today's Dutch universities also work closely with the private sector in technological top institutes, science parks and innovation labs.

Incidentally, the critical contents of the above excerpts are the very antithesis of the character of university education in Nigeria. Butterman, et al, (2007), further highlights:

The Netherlands has two main types of higher education. Research universities focus on the independent practice of research-oriented work in an academic or professional setting. They essentially train students in academic study and research, although many study programmes also have a professional component. Universities of applied sciences are more practically oriented, preparing students directly for specific careers. Their study programmes focus on the practical application of knowledge. University education and research in the Netherlands has traditionally been characterized by its high quality and it has always been internationally oriented.

It therefore remains puzzling that Nigeria-Netherlands relations have not truly accommodated educational matters as critical component, particularly at the university level. It further attracts curiosity that what ranks as the most ambitious relations in this regard is the Business School Netherlands Nigeria (BSNN) promotion.

NIGERIA-NETHERLAND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Under the Jonathan Administration, the Nigerian Ambassador to the Netherlands, Dr. Nimota Akanbi, has continued to lead many foreign missions to Nigeria with the aim of attracting foreign investors to the country. By March, 2012, she had led the seventh trade mission from Netherlands to Nigeria. These trade missions according to the Minister are in line with the transformation agenda of President Goodluck Jonathan. Moreover, she sees the attraction of investment and promotion of trade between Nigeria and the Netherlands as one of the central themes of her work (Aderanti, 2012). Furthermore, in March, 2012, the government of The Netherlands said it would increase its investment inflow into Nigeria by 100 per cent from the €8bn (about N1.656tn) to €16bn (N3.3tn) within the shortest possible time. This is in spite of the security challenges currently facing the country, which have made some investors to express worries about the investment climate in Nigeria (Onuba, 2012).

The Federal Government of Nigeria and the Netherlands are reported to have commenced plans for the setting up of a Dutch agro-industrial park in Nigeria, in line with the determination of the Jonathan Administration to create jobs, generate wealth and enhance economic growth. The decision to explore the strengths of both countries for a win-win economic relationship was reached during a meeting between the Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Mr. Olusegun Aganga; and the Netherlands Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lilianne Ploumen, on the sidelines of the Nigeria-Netherlands Business and Investment Forum in The Hague, Netherlands (Osagie, 2013). The Netherlands has a well developed food processing industry. They are accordingly, among the largest global producers and exporters of food. This, combined with the availability of raw materials and the large market in Nigeria, will give rise to a successful partnership on the establishment of an industrial zone on food processing in Nigeria (Osagie, 2013). The two ministers have therefore agreed to set up a technical team to execute the

project as fast as possible. The Netherlands foreign trade minister also disclosed that the country was setting up a 700 million euro growth fund to help their SMEs invest in growth areas, and agreed to the federal government's proposal to put Nigeria on that list. It was also agreed that there would be possibilities for Nigerian SMEs to access the growth fund to expand their businesses and also invest in critical and thriving sectors (Osagie, 2013). But all this keep appearing like beautiful proposals.

Of critical importance in the analysis of Nigeria-Netherlands economic cooperation, is the position of Shell Petroleum International. The multinational oil and gas behemoth currently known as Royal Dutch Shell Plc, made Nigeria's first commercial discovery of crude oil in the tertiary area of the Niger Delta in 1956, and exported the first consignment of crude from the country in 1958 (World Bank, 1975, cited in Olusi and Olagunju, 2005). Currently, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's largest joint venture partner, Shell Petroleum International (a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell Plc) has its Headquarters in the Netherlands where the headquarters of Shell is located. Invariably, the contributions of Shell have been critical to Nigeria's economic development. It does appear however as if these contributions are enveloped in some international relations obscurities that make them apparent but neither popular nor even populist. However, Weli (2013) has made an impressive documentation of Shell's intervention in very critical areas of Nigeria's socio-economic development. Besides demonstrating that Shell is the largest oil and gas company in Nigeria, Weli (2013) also highlights that:

To promote research and development, Shell donated equipment to Federal Universities in Owerri, Ibadan and Port Harcourt, to establish schools for development of local capacity, to produce drilling mud for the oil and gas industry. We built and equipped the Centre for Environmental Management and Control at Nsukka, in South East Nigeria, to provide world-class Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) services. Other interventions include the donation of wave stimulation equipment to the University of Science & Technology in the Niger Delta and sponsorship of a Centre of Excellence for Geosciences & Petroleum Engineering in the University of Benin. Periodically, we undertake targeted research projects with academic institutions in Nigeria and now outsource sub-surface study work to indigenous contractors to develop in-country capability in that category.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NIGERIA-NETHERLANDS RELATIONS

Indeed, Nigeria-Netherlands relations appear immensely long on diplomatic niceties and ever-oncoming proposals and rather short on discernible achievements and benefits on the Nigerian side that can be ascribed to Nigeria's diplomatic astuteness. Nigeria-Netherlands relations are still conducted at the state-centric level by Nigerian officials, whereby state officials on the Nigerian side perceive their own presence at Nigeria-Netherlands meetings as ends in themselves. But in the face of acute developmental challenges in Nigeria, this Nigerian diplomatic tendency belongs to some out-modeled paradigms of international cooperation. For instance, while Nigeria-Netherlands cooperation concentrates on its ostensible economic centerpiece how has Nigeria-Netherlands diplomacy contributed to the check-mating of the Boko Haram danger in Nigeria?

It is highly likely that an outline is not in existence anywhere for Nigeria-Netherlands socio-cultural cooperation. In 2011, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) survey, ranked the Netherlands as the happiest country in the world (Hudson, 2011).

Comparatively, Nigerians know themselves as deeply angry and bewildered over their current tragic national circumstances. Akosile (2014) describes anger as a normal emotion in the present-day Nigeria. Hence in an era of critical developmental challenges, occasioning frequent expressions of angry emotions, how may Nigeria-Netherlands socio-cultural relations support diplomatic efforts at the political and economic fronts, in delivering the Nigerian State from the woods? Why for instance are there no Shell-sponsored cultural events in Nigeria? If for instance, there were such Shell sponsored cultural events, they should not be embedded in obscurities; they should be widely recognized and internationally celebrated as important Nigeria-Netherlands cultural events. The Netherlands might have spent an estimated € 1.3 million in Nigeria in 2012 alone, through the Human Rights Fund, which supports initiatives that protect human rights and fight corruption (Government of Netherlands, n.d). It should be noted however that the Nigerian elite do not behave like holy angels over matters bordering on such funding interventions (see Okeke, 2014). The Nigerian elite have been repeatedly accused of insensitivity towards inclusive concerns that can save the Nigerian state from imminent collapse. When the Netherlands therefore provide funds for capacity building in Nigeria, it is important to ensure that such interventions are also fully citizens-centered.

Generally in the area of education, the Nigerian State is critically confronted by developmental challenges (Okeke and Chukwudebelu, 2014). Nigeria-Netherlands-related opportunities in this area have also not been boldly explored by the Nigerian side. Outside the Business School Netherlands Nigeria (BSNN) idea and the collaboration between CITO of the Netherlands and Nigeria's JAMB, other Nigeria-Netherlands educational relationships are also promoted in the realm of obscurities. According to the Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations (2007), advanced scientific research and development (R&D) has provided the technological impetus for the Netherlands' economic recovery since World War II. Dutch universities have traditionally carried out fundamental scientific research, and the government has promoted research activities through the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, established in 1988, and the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research, established in 1930. It also has supported scientific organizations such as the Energy Development Corp. and Energy Research Foundation, Aerospace Development Agency, National Aerospace Laboratory, and Netherlands Maritime Institute. Furthermore, the highly developed electro technical industry produces computers, telecommunications systems, electronic measurement and control equipment, electric switching gear and transformers, and medical and scientific instruments. Dutch firms designed and constructed the Netherlands' astronomical satellites and play a major role in the European Space Agency. The important aerospace industry is led by the world-famous firm of Fokker, which produced Europe's bestselling passenger jet aircraft, the F-27 Friendship, and has been active in the consortium that developed the European Airbus (Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations, 2007). Yet, in the face of these critical competences in the Netherlands environment, the only widely celebrated technical cooperation in education and the allied science and technology field, between Nigeria and the Netherlands, is in the CITO-supported testing of university matriculation candidates!

In the area of the trade, investments and industrialization needs of the Nigerian State, Nigeria-Netherlands relations are still characterized by immense rigmarole, featuring egregious diplomatic appearances that have hardly translated to reality for the Nigerian citizens. For instance, in the same direction that the presence of Shell Petroleum International is recognized in the oil and gas area in Nigeria and indeed in many other areas (see Weli, 2013), Vlisco can also be encouraged to become a giant textile industry player in the Nigerian economy. The Nigerian

market portends inexhaustible business opportunities for Vlisco. The Jonathan Administration can work towards getting the Netherlands giant textile industry player, to establish a functional manufacturing presence in Nigeria. Indeed, the truth remains that very many generations of Nigerians know Vlisco's Hollandis Wax as the ultimate brand in that line of products. That those materials are no longer commonly and legally found in the Nigerian markets must be a matter of serious concern in Nigeria-Netherlands trade and commercial relations

CONCLUSION - IMPROVING NIGERIA-NETHERLANDS RELATIONS:

A NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

International cooperation suffers from severe limitations when it is only centered on a single existential index. In the instance of Nigeria-Netherlands relations, the focus has ostensibly been on economic matters, trade and investments. To that extent, there is a definable focus for Nigeria-Netherlands relations, under the Jonathan Administration. This focus is incidentally, also marred by obscurities. The truth however is that Nigeria-Netherlands relations have only been surviving on Shell-related relevance. Hence, the definable focus is the scarecrow type that keeps scratching the diplomatic surface while the impactful Nigeria-Netherlands relations remain positively Shell-centered. It is strongly recommended that Nigerian state officials should begin to look inwards to discover some Nigerian made items that can promote exports-propelled Nigerian-Netherlands economic cooperation, from the Nigerian side. There are also other notable Dutch companies with immense, previously immense or potentially immense presence in Nigeria. These include the Royal Philips Electronics, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Unilever and Heineken. Nigeria-Netherlands economic cooperation must also critically be about the opportunities attendant to the creation of an enabling environment for these companies to restore confidence in the Nigerian system. In the face of the critical shortcomings of Nigeria's educational system, particularly at the tertiary level, Nigeria-Netherlands relations could necessarily lead to the establishment of a Netherlands University of Nigeria. In conclusion, we also call for the institution of a Nigeria-Netherlands annual lecture series, as a veritable platform for the propagation of the ideals of mutually beneficial Nigeria-Netherlands relations.

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