

Institutional Restructuring and Reforms for National Development

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ABSTRACT: *This paper argues that weak national institutions cannot be relied upon to produce successful restructuring and reform packages that can lead to accelerated national development and higher living standards for the Nigerian people. The paper further identifies weak national institutions, the pursuit of pecuniary individual and group interests, ethnic cleavages and intra-ethnic rivalries among the elite class, including the extractive nature of politics and economic pursuits, as major factors militating against successful restructuring and meaningful institutional reforms in Nigeria, which are hinged on accelerated technological innovation, political development and wealth creation. The paper concludes that only strong and functional institutions, inclusive political and economic policies, and innovative leadership can bring about accelerated national development in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Institutional restructuring, reforms, national development

INTRODUCTION

Political scientists and development economists are in agreement that the absence of a centralised “structure of hierarchical political authority” that is based on the rule of law is responsible for institutional drift in most developing countries—especially those in sub-Saharan Africa. Paradoxically, and in opposition to good governance, ill-equipped leaders and centrifugal forces pulling the country away from the path of progress constitute a major obstacle to accelerated national development. For instance, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Haiti, Yemen, Nepal and sub-

Saharan Africa fit into clannish societies that parade weak institutions that are in dire need of restructuring and reforms that should have lifted them out of cyclical crises and endemic poverty. Nigeria is a classic example of an abundantly endowed nation that is doing everything possible to behead itself. Meng Li has argued that “institutions are better addressed in the context of the goals, policies and actors they are meant to serve.” Li uses the phrase “adaptive learning process” to describe policy implementation in multi-level institutional structures that maintain a balance between “top-bottom and bottom-up processes.” Adaptive systems, according to Dalal-Clayton and Bass, (2002) are systems that can continuously improve over time. They further state that government agencies are typically organized into sectoral or functional ministries and departments that work well until they encounter highly targeted disruptive activities by individuals or groups with narrowly-defined interests that are opposed to the national interest.

Successful institutional restructuring and reforms are essentially predicated on strong national institutions that can support the methodical, systematic and progressive implementation of policies. Unfortunately, most developing countries are notorious for their lack of strong institutions that can power the structures upon which stable and progressive nations depend for their accelerated national developmental home and respect abroad. Institutional restructuring and reforms are difficult to implement because differences among powerful elites tend to grow over time and create “institutional drift” that usually undermine national unity and accelerated economic development.

In scientific terms, random genetic mutations are known to have occurred even among isolated populations of organisms that threaten their specie. According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), such institutional drift could determine how societies react to economic and political institutional changes. They further submit that “existing economic and political institutions shape the balance of power and delineate what is politically feasible.” In such circumstances, only genuine restructuring and reforms can result in “institutional transition” to a better society and assured future for the citizens.

In societies that lack functional central authority, reforms are difficult to implement because as Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) further argue, “those who benefit from the status quo are wealthy and well organized and can effectively fight major changes that will takeaway their economic privileges and political power.”

Nowotny (2012) notes that where there are centrifugal forces pulling the national development effort apart, “growth will be much slower because of institutional deficiencies.” He further submits that, “The formal political and economic institutions have to rest upon the informal base of economic, civil and political society” for their speedy realisation. The basic assumption here is that formal institutions have to be first established before a strong democratic culture and civil society can take root and grow. This can only happen through full embolization of the populace and their continuous participation in the processes that lead to the emergence of genuine democratic

institutions. The “pessimistic alternative” is unremitting dictatorship even under so-called “democratic” dispensation which considers the mere motion of periodic elections as an end in itself, rather than a means to an end as we see in Nigeria today.

Before we proceed further, however, it would be important to foreground the key words that are relevant in the context of this discussion. They are ‘institution’, ‘restructuring’, ‘reforms’ and ‘national development’ in that order. All developmental endeavour largely depend on strong national institutions and global support systems to succeed. Weak national institutions are usually built on faulty structures that ultimately require full restructuring and reforms before they can conduce to national development and be accepted by all stakeholders in the art of nation-building. By their very nature, institutions are very resilient and built to achieve specified purposes and they develop customs and traditions over time that guide their operational structure. National institutions are resilient because they are basically built on laws, conventions and an accountable system that guide the conduct of citizens and check the reign of tyranny and anarchy.

In countries without properly structured institutional framework, restructuring and reforms are difficult to achieve. In such circumstances, the path to national development has so far “generated economic stagnation and political instability, civil wars and coups, as groups struggled for the benefits of power” (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012:37). Once they are able to ascend the economic and political ladder, the privileged elite class erect “entry barriers” that exclude others from gaining access to economic privileges and political power which inevitably create social tension. Under such distasteful extractive power equation, citizens are not allowed to choose their preferred candidates and vote freely in elections that are only possible in a pluralistic political system. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) have rightly submitted that:

It is the political process that determines
what economic institutions people live under,
and it is the political institutions that determine
how this process works...it is the political institutions
of a nation that determine the ability of citizens to
control politicians and influence how they behave (p.42).

The faulty political structures that Nigeria operated at Independence and the resulting ‘intra-elite rivalries’ have combined with neo-colonial pressures to further weaken the foundation of the nation. It was such ‘intra-ethnic rivalries’ among the dominant ethnic groups that inexorably propelled Nigeria down the destructive path of hate speeches, election violence, a coup and costly civil war between 1966 and 1970.

What are the structural and institutional deficiencies that undermine Nigeria’s efforts aimed at attaining accelerated national development? What are the consequences for national development? What recommendations can we proffer?

INSTITUTIONAL AND CAPACITY GAPS

Experience shows that any intelligent approach to restructuring and accelerated national development, borrowing from the work of Peters and Waterman Jr. (1982:10), must consider seven interdependent variables as shown in Figure 1- Criteria for organizational performance and national development. These are leadership, structure, strategy, corporate strength or skills, people, shared values or culture. These variables are shaped by the prevailing political, economic, and socio-cultural systems.

Of all these variables leadership is the key. Strong institutions are driven by the leader. The success of any change initiative is dependent upon the impact of the leader. He makes the decisions which determine both organisational purpose and the means by which that purpose is fulfilled.

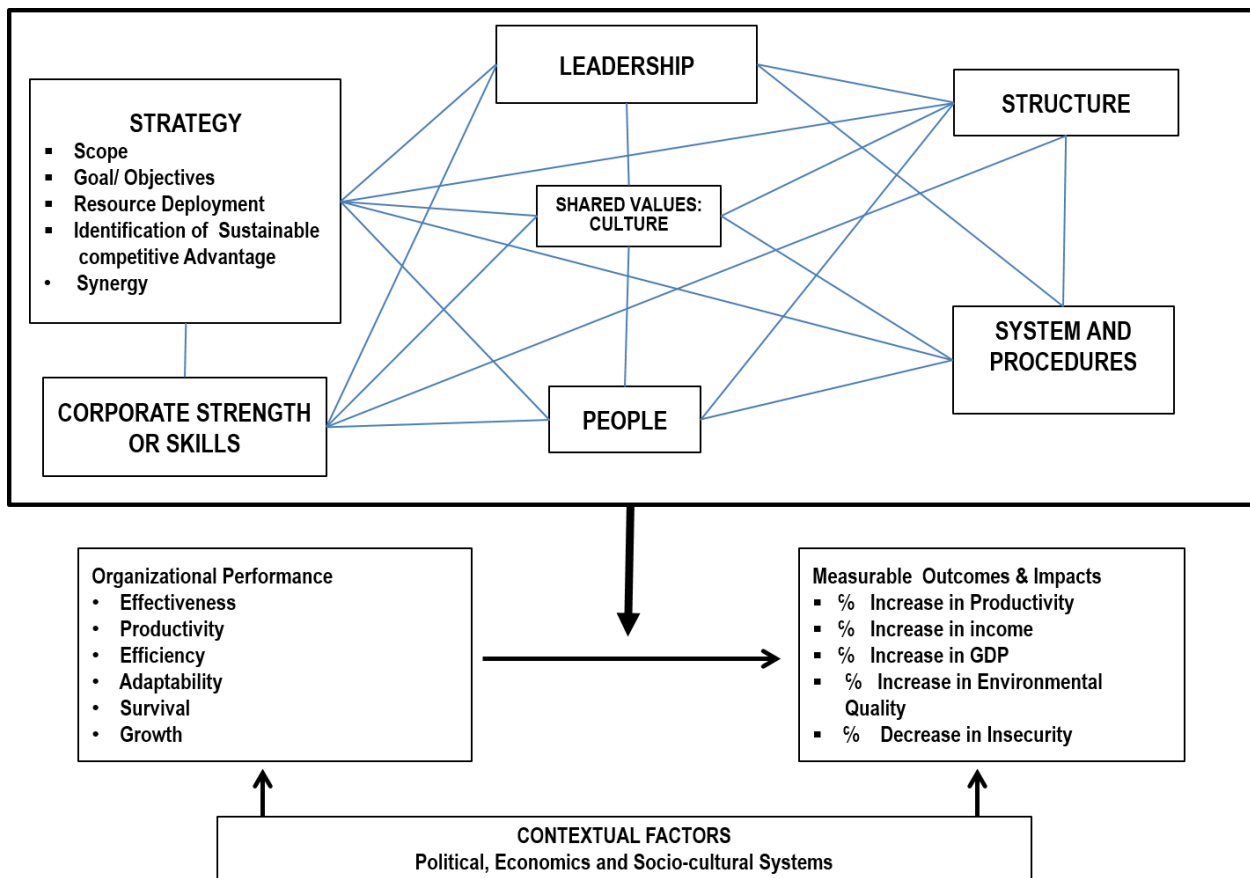


Fig. 1: CRITERIA FOR ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is difficult to have adequate coverage of all sub-sectors in the business system that affect the Nigerian national development effort. We will highlight a few key issues in the following business

systems. These include the following: the financial/accounting system, marketing system, entrepreneurship, tourism and hospitality system, and information technology system.

Financial/Accounting system: Despite claims of attracting foreign direct investment, there is incontrovertible evidence to prove that Nigeria's hostile financial system grossly undermines investor confidence and sets the local business environment on edge. The country's anachronistic and cumbersome tax system further undermines genuine economic activities, profit takings.

For instance, the country's accounting system continues to lack the kind of openness and transparency that can stimulate the economy. Government agencies responsible for generating national income turn in conflicting figures that raise questions of accountability and transparency. Ogwumike and Salisu (2012) identify inefficiency in banking operations, poor management and misallocation of resources and political interference as some of the factors that triggered distress in the country's banking system, which also weakened the capacity of the financial system to mobilise resources for national development.

The tax system is a major challenge that has not been properly addressed. Such challenging issues include, but not limited to (a) lack of reliable statistical data system (b) poor tax evaluation and administration (c) multiplicity of taxes at all levels of governance, including elaborate illegal touting network that diverts critically-needed resources away from government coffers (d) misappropriation of tax money by dubious officials and (e) a rising subterranean economy that operates outside the national economy.

Marketing system: Nigeria has risen beyond the primitive 'trade by barter' mode of exchanging goods and services, but it still lacks the full attributes of clearly defined 'physical and conceptual' contexts that facilitate exchange in the modern economy. While those engaged in the exchange of goods and services may be maximising profits, the country has not fully expanded its marketing strategies in such a way that facilitate business transactions and wealth creation for its citizens. And reasons are not far-fetched.

Apart from general infrastructural deficiency everywhere you look, we are faced with issues of poor storage, processing, packaging, distribution and retail of agricultural goods and services that should create prosperity for farmers—especially those in rural areas. The national headache and global shame created by the so-called 'killer herdsmen' phenomenon could be easily addressed by the establishment of a Botswana-style cattle economy that is properly regulated to generate huge income for the country, rather than bloodshed and national disunity. In the absence of information and requisite infrastructure, rural economic activities cannot be effectively linked to urban consumers with the income power to purchase goods. The agricultural processing industry remains at a pristine stage of development, thus confining Nigeria to a net exporter of raw materials to developed nations.

There is need for proper institutionalization of structure such as the Marketing Board that will be responsible for the promotion and distribution of products produced by local farmers and

manufacturers to ensure that they have very good access to local and international markets. Many Nigerian farmers, for example, lack the appropriate knowledge of the state-of-the-art technology and skills required for major players in the international markets. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of our products do not attract competitive pricing in the international market.

Entrepreneurship system. According to Sappin (2016), entrepreneurs create businesses that in turn create jobs, while people with jobs make good consumers. People with entrepreneurship and innovative skills engage in business activities that stimulate economic growth and enable investors to create wealth for themselves and others. If a nation lacks the capacity to deliver quality education to its citizens, then such a poorly educated citizenry cannot develop the requisite entrepreneurial know-how to engineer economic growth. That is the crisis of Nigeria's system that delivers bogus certificates that are not commensurate with what is learned in our poorly-equipped school system.

Tourism/Hospitality system. Despite the multiplicity of ministries and agencies that promote tourism, the huge potentials of Nigeria's tourism industry are yet to be tapped to generate revenue at the levels of such African countries as Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Rwanda and Botswana, etc. Available figures show that the country generated a dismal 4.8 per cent to our Gross Domestic Product in 2016. The hospitality and tourism industry are being further undermined by lack of 'a clear roadmap' from policy makers, poor infrastructure, underdeveloped tourism destinations, cumbersome Visa and Immigration procedures, insecurity (especially kidnapping), inadequate luxury hotel accommodation and high taxes, paucity of trained personnel and a supportive social network. Tourists cannot travel from one part of the country to another without encountering logistic nightmares that undermine pleasurable trips (See *ProshareWebTV*, January 30, 2017).

People undertake tourism travel because of the following reasons: leisure, recreation, medical treatment, festival, pilgrimage, sporting events, family affairs, conference, and studies. It is, therefore, the task of government to create an enabling environment that will foster the attainment of the reasons why people undertake tourism.

Given the potentials in the country's tourism and hospitality industry, there is an urgent need to revamp and develop the sector.

Information Technology system. In the age of information technology, it is obvious that a functional ICT system contributes immensely to national development. It is rather regrettable that Nigeria remains far behind in the digital divide, a fact that negatively impacts every other activity. According to Bello and Aderbigbe, "The digital divide characterised by highly narrow and unequal access to and use of ICT that manifests itself both at the international and domestic level, needs to be addressed by national policy makers."

The final issues we wish to address in this segment are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). SDGs are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations **Development** programme, also known as "2030 Agenda,"

designed to lift poor nations out of grinding poverty. They are a call to action aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The immediate challenge the Nigerian government faced under the defunct MDGs were how to end poverty, hunger, illiteracy, increase enrolment into foundational education and disease eradication. From every indication, none of the goals was attained as the project lapsed in September 2015. The SDGs are even more challenging with 169 targets, which seek to attain balanced economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development on the same agenda for the first time to drive national development (www.mastercardcentre.org/).

RESTRUCTURING AND REFORMS

The architecture of national institutions is based on the interconnectedness and arrangement of the various components that make up their parts. Like all structures, nations are made up of diverse components that are differentiated by the unique identity of each group. The component parts could be well-organised, resulting in proper national development or they could be disorganised, necessitating urgent institutional restructuring and reform that aim at restoring them to the desired path of national development. The concept of restructuring and reform suggest institutional drift that need to be rectified for things to work well in society. Nigeria is at such crossroads or “critical juncture” at this point in her national development effort.

Governments that are ideologically driven towards neo-liberal economic policies are known to concentrate their efforts on “promoting economic transition and reform” that largely benefit the rich. On the other hand, left-leaning regimes tend to champion equitable resource distribution and social welfare packages over and above the forces of production that enrich the elite class. Leftist governments generally tend to shun economic policies that curtail public spending and social welfare which are usually recommended by Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank, IMF, etc.), while neo-liberal governments tend to roll back public spending and welfare packages that benefit ordinary people. Development economists now sub-divide nations into developed economies, transition economies and emerging markets. Nigeria’s position on the economic reform scale is quite obvious as the country continues to hesitate over the daunting challenges of political restructuring and economic reforms to stabilise the country.

In Nigeria today, the word “restructuring” mutates along ethnic, elite, religious, business and political interest lines. For instance, if you ask the average South Easterner what “restructuring” means to him, his instant reply would be “Biafra”. Pose the same question to the people of the Niger Delta and you will hear “Resource Control”. To the average Yoruba people, restructuring simply means continued control of the national economy and government bureaucracy, while the Arewa people want unending political control.

The people of the North Central zone want freedom from core Hausa-Fulani domination as their own justification for “restructuring.” To the elite class of every persuasion, restructuring means continued exploitation of the masses and they do so by championing ethnic and religious

sentiments to carry their self-serving message across. The discerning observer may then wish to know why Nigerians search in different dictionaries for the real meaning of “restructuring”. Not so surprisingly, some highly-educated Nigerians have recently claimed that they no longer know the etymological meaning of the word! But there is an embedded economic dimension to the seeming confusion.

It has long been argued that Nigeria’s road to political stability and economic prosperity can only be guaranteed in an open “market economy, internal democracy” and a supportive international order. Despite the run of uninterrupted democracy that has spanned over seventeen years, Nigeria is yet to attain tangible economic growth, thus bringing into serious question, the relationship between the two. Nowotny (2012) further claims that,

If we now compare performers
as economic reformers with performance
in democratic consolidation, we find that
the two correlate. Those who are good democratic
performers are also good economic reformers.
Those who are good democratic performers are
also, good economic reformers, whereas those
who have a poor democratic record also perform
poorly with economic reform”

Nowotny’s claim is, at best, a sweeping generalisation that is not supported by available facts in the international economic equation. For instance, it is on record that the Chinese have attained quantum economic prosperity without allowing their citizens even marginal participation in the democratic process. When some Chinese citizens attempted to demand democratic inclusion in 1989, Tiananmen Square was turned into bloody scenes. At some point, the Chinese economy was growing at a whopping 8.2 per cent rate. In Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler grew the economy to become the largest in Europe between 1940 and 1944, which enabled him to launch World War II. As Fukuyama (2012) rightly argues, “development is not only about economics. Political institutions develop as do social ones. Sometimes political and social development are closely related to economic changes, but at other times they happen independently.”

Restructuring and reforms are usually necessitated by noticeable structural defects that tend to undermine ordered institutional development. The strident calls for ‘restructuring’ by various interest groups in Nigeria is the direct result of noticeable structural defects that date back to the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 and pre-Independence power cleavages amongst the three dominant ethnic groups that continue to jostle for political and economic advantages. These intra-elite and intra-ethnic rivalries weaken national institutions and necessitate sweeping restructuring and hastily-conceived reform programmes.

In a nutshell, restructuring and reforms occur when there is a need for institutional reorganisation that is aimed at achieving greater efficiency. Restructuring happens when institutions adapt to

changes in their internal structures in response to imminent crises. The change so generated helps to alter or restore the stressed structure to normal operations. The process of reform in such circumstance would seek to create improvements through alteration of the *status quo*. Whether it is restructuring or reforms, the result is usually to remove institutional defects or shortcomings for progress to happen and for citizens to enjoy better living standards.

CONSEQUENCES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Acemoglu and Robinson (2013:1-5) have submitted that the roots of discontent in most developing countries lie in their grinding poverty. Successful institutional reforms would create a conducive atmosphere for technological innovation, political and economic and national development. Acemoglu and Robinson add that developing nations can come out of poverty if they attain genuine political transformation and take that “first hesitant step” towards political pluralism. They further argue that no meaningful national development can take place in countries where government serves as the conveyor-belt for exclusive elite expropriation of the commonwealth. National development is further undermined by extractive economic and political systems that exclude the vast majority of the people who are not allowed to share in the distribution of national prosperity.

Gladiatorial contests for political power and economic privileges are major causes of institutional weakness in Nigeria today. Politics enables societies to decide under what form of governance structure they may choose to operate. Institutions are constructed around politics in the understanding that inclusive institutions would result in economic prosperity, while extractive social institutions serve mainly the interest of a rapacious and self-serving elite class. Intra-elite struggles for power and economic privileges usually favour groups that can mobilise resources and form alliances to advance their pecuniary interests. As Acemoglu and Robinson see it, “Political institutions determine who has power in society and to what end that power can be used.” Tensions and occasional violence are part of the Nigerian political terrain because extractive economic institutions favour the rich who deploy their vast economic privileges and connections to consolidate political power over the helpless majority in society. Unless society becomes pluralistic (inclusive), the power of extractive institutions will inevitably lead to agitations for restructuring and reforms, failing which society is thrown into violence and in some cases war.

In the final analysis, it is clear that no meaningful national development can take place without having strong leaders who are courageous enough to apply consequent management. While we all agree that it is strong systems that build great nations, such nations still need strong, competent, and decisive leaders who can steer the boat towards the desired direction.

The leader must sensitize the citizens on the common shared values that serve as guidance for organisational decision making and also provide ethical compass for organisational action.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to conclude that only strong and functional institutions, inclusive political and economic policies and innovative leadership can bring about accelerated national development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Li submits that a system that can adapt to prevailing realities

encompasses situation analysis, formulation of policies and action plans, implementation, monitoring and regular review. It is a cyclical and interactive process of planning, participation and action in which the emphasis is on managing progress towards sustainability goals rather than producing a 'plan' as an end product. (UNDESA, 2012).

As part of the institutional reform process, sustainable development must be integrated into existing "national development strategies," rather than operating as separate blueprints that run parallel expenditure patterns. The various national development plans in Nigeria did not succeed because they were not directly linked to addressing the poverty environment in which they were conceived. Experience has proved that input from the local people is very critical to successful institutional restructuring and reform. For reform programmes to succeed, the importance of local authorities must be recognised in the national development processes. The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have identified **seven guiding principles** for institutional restructuring and reforms that developing nations such as Nigeria must embrace to move forward.

They are:

- a. Partnership for collective responsibility, decision-making and planning
- b. Participation and transparency among stakeholders
- c. Systemic approach that addresses underlying causes and whole systems
- d. Concern for the future that addresses short and long-term trends and needs
- e. Accountability by all stakeholders for their actions
- f. Equity and justice: economic development must be equitable, environmentally sound and socially just
- g. Ecological limits that require all communities to live within the earth's carrying capacity (Source: www.iclei.org).

Reform in Nigeria must include devolution and decentralisation of powers away from the Federal Government to States and Local Governments to usher in accelerated development. That is what is meant by true federalism in other climes. "These would act as the basis for defining each level's rights, so as to avoid overlap and to enable leaders to be active in the decision-making process" (Chien in Varghese ed 2009:161). Duplication of functions and policy overlap must end, while

smarter ways of making and implementing decisions must be embraced. In a properly restructured Nigeria, Abuja should no longer be the problem and answer to every national question.

In the final analysis, strong institutions must replace the “African Strongman” to ensure popular participation by the people. Such strong institutions must assume supreme authority over society and rulers, because no proper reform can happen without institutionalising the rule of law and accountability. “It does not seem very plausible that extremely poor and chaotic countries could expect to put into place complex institutions in short order, given how long such institutions took to evolve.” (Fukuyama 2012). Institutional reforms cannot take place until the nation begins to “rely more on talented and less political appointees” to run ministries, agencies and departments of government. Talented people can be relied upon to be creative, innovative and entrepreneurial in their approach to public service in line with global best practices. According to Acemoglu and Robinson: “Innovation comes from new people with new ideas, developing new solutions to old problems”.

Citing the 1998/1999 World Bank Development Report, Salmi (2008), recommends an “analytical framework emphasising the contemporary role of four key strategic dimensions to guide countries in the transition to a knowledge-based economy:...*an appropriate economic and institutional regime, a strong human capital base, a dynamic information infrastructure, and an efficient national innovation system*

Institutions, on their own, cannot be relied upon to restructure and reform society; human and “social capital” are essential to bringing about innovations that can move society in the desired direction. Salmi’s sound recommendation quoted above is a right note on which to end this discourse; but we may stretch the argument to make the point that institutional restructuring and reform must give all citizens the right to development defined as “the right of individuals, groups, and peoples to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy continuous economic, social, cultural, and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.” (Quoted in Chomsky 2000:134). When individuals and groups cannot realise these rights within existing institutional frameworks, then they must demand restructuring and reforms that will lead the way to accelerated institutional transition and national development.

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