SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANISING: THE PATH TO POVERTY ERADICATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Protocols

1. PREAMBLE

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to stand before you today to deliver the keynote address at the launch of ActionAid Nigeria's new Country Strategy Paper titled ***Citizens Action Against Poverty and Injustice (2024-2034***). This event is significant to me at a personal level. In 2004, twenty years ago, I was appointed the Country Director of ActionAid Nigeria. In 2004, the poverty rate in Nigeria was 54.7 percent representing about 74.8 million people. Today, the poverty rate is projected to be 40.7 percent representing 93.3 million people. So, in spite of all our best efforts, poverty is increasing.

In this keynote address, we make an argument for social movement as the path to poverty eradication and social justice. But first, we give the background and conceptualise social movement organising, theory and practice.

2. BACKGROUND

This launch of ActionAid Nigeria's Country Strategy Paper is taking place at a critical juncture for Nigeria. The country is facing huge political, economic and social challenges. Scholars have identified the challenges to include among other things poor leadership; bad followership; poor strategy for development; lack of capable and effective state and bureaucracy; lack of focus on sectors that will improve the condition of living of citizens such as education, health, agriculture and the building of infrastructure; corruption; undeveloped, irresponsible and parasitic private sector; weak civil society; emasculated labour and student movement and poor execution of policies and programmes.[1] Nigeria as a country has been battered and urgently needs rebirth and building. Nigeria is ranked 163rd in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) out of 191 countries in 2021. Nigeria's life expectancy is 52.7 years in 2021 (compared with 64.38 years in South Africa, 72.22 years in Egypt and 87.57 years in Japan). According to UNICEF, Nigeria has 18.5 million out-of-school children, the highest in the world.[2] The World's Economist Intelligence Unit report which ranks the best and worst cities to live in the world indicated that Lagos in Nigeria is the third worst city to live in the World.[3] The other cities are Damascus, Syria (1); Tripoli, Libya (2); Dhaka, Bangladesh (4); Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (5); Algiers, Algeria (6); Karachi, Pakistan (6); Harare, Zimbabwe (8) and Doula, Cameroun (9). The poverty rate in Nigeria increased from 15 percent in 1960 to 28.1 percent in 1980 to 69.2 per cent in 1997 to about 40.7 percent currently hosting the second largest number of poor people in the world.

It is instructive to note that by 2014, Nigeria ranked third in hosting the largest number of poor people in the world after India (first position) and China (second position).[4] But by 2018, Nigeria was declared as the world poverty capital with around 87 million people living in extreme poverty compared with India's 73 million according to the World Poverty Clock. It is important to note that the population of Nigeria in 2018 was estimated to be about 195.9 million which is about 15 percent of the population of India (1.353 billion) and 14 percent of China (1.393 billion), yet it is competing with China and India in hosting the largest number of poor people in the world. The change was partly as a result of social protection policies implemented by China and India combined with enlightened leadership and pressure from below. According to the McKinsey Global Report, 2018, China lifted 713 million people and India 170 million people out of poverty between 1990

and 2013. They achieved this feat through inclusive, pro- poor growth; fiscal policies for wealth redistribution; employment generation; public service provision and social protection.[5] But by 2022, about 83 million Indians were plunged into poverty making India to overtake Nigeria leaving Nigeria to second position.

Inspite of these challenges, the ruling elite have continued with business-as-usual mode. The Federal Government in 2023 inaugurated the largest cabinet in Nigeria's history. They used 21 billion naira to renovate the Vice-President's house. The length of convoy, lifestyle and public posturing of the ruling elite does not reflect the reality of majority of Nigerians. Only a few days ago, there was a national protest against bad governance. Despite the best efforts of progressive forces in Nigeria, poverty and injustice remains a huge challenge. This is why there is the need to revisit the path to poverty eradication and social justice.

3. SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANISING

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups that strive toward a common goal, such as creating change, resisting change, or giving voice to disenfranchised groups. Social movements typically emerge when there is dysfunction in the relationship between systems, systematic inequality, deprivation, or widespread discontent. Examples of social movement organizing include the anti-tobacco movement, the Arab Spring, the anti-apartheid movement, the workers' movement, the women's movement, and the student movement. In the current era, social media plays a pivotal role in social movement mobilization, and artificial intelligence has great potential for enhancing this mobilization.

Several scholars have explored the reasons behind the birth, growth, and maturation of various types of social movements. The 1950s saw the emergence of significant social movements in the US and Europe, including the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the feminist and gender equality movements, and the environmental movement. The theories explaining these phenomena include:

1. **Deprivation Theory:** Social movements arise when certain people or groups in a society feel deprived of specific goods, services, or resources.
2. **Resource Mobilization Theory:** When individuals in a society have certain grievances, they may mobilize necessary resources, such as money, labor, social status, knowledge, and the support of the media and political elite, to address these grievances.
3. **Political Process Theory:** This theory posits that the success of movements depends on the availability of political opportunities and the power of the government. If the government is strongly entrenched and repressive, a social movement is likely to fail. Conversely, if the government is weak or tolerant of dissent, the movement has a better chance of flourishing.
4. **Structural Strain Theory:** This theory suggests that six factors are necessary for a social movement to grow:
   1. People in society experience some type of problem (deprivation).
   2. Recognition by people that this problem exists.

3. An ideology proposing a solution develops and spreads.
4. An event or events convert this nascent movement into a bona fide social movement.
5. The society (and its government) is open to change for the movement to be effective.
6. Mobilization of resources as the movement develops further.

5. **New Social Movement Theories:** These theories move away from the traditional Marxist framework, which analyzes collective action from an economic perspective, to focus on politics, ideology, and culture. They emphasize new definers of collective identity, such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Social movements produce learning in two ways: direct learning, when people participate in movements, and indirect learning, when people observe the operation of movements. Both types of learning are crucial as they can transform the behavior of people in society. Social movements influence how people, both participants and non-participants, interpret the world, potentially impelling them to take actions that result in social change.

The history of Social Movements in Africa dates back to the colonial era where they led the struggle for independence.[6] They include the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, the National Liberation Front of Algeria, and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) of Mozambique. In recent past, there has been movement type organising such as:

a. The #EndSARS Movement began in 2017 against police brutality and extra judicial killing by the Police in Nigeria.
b. #FeesMustFall in South Africa launched in 2015 led by students against proposed in increase in university fees.
c. #Afriforum in South Africa established in 2006 focusing on protecting the rights of Afrikaners in post apartheid South Africa.
d. Y'en a Marre (Fed Up) in Senegal formed in 2011 by a group of rappers and Journalists with focus on political accountability and youth empowerment.
e. #ArewaMeToo in Nigeria which emerged in 2009 with focus on sexual violence and harassment in Northern Nigeria.

All these movements achieved varying degrees of success. For instance, the #EndSARS and #FeesMustFall compelled governments of Nigeria and South Africa to rethink policies and implement reforms. The #ArewaMeToo broke societal taboos forcing open discussion of sexual violence.

4. **THE PATH TO POVERTY ERADICATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The path to poverty eradication and efforts made in this direction have long historical roots. In the early modern period, poverty was seen as an unavoidable aspect of life. Some even tried to justify poverty with the biblical scripture in Matt 26:11 "the poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." (NIV). In any case, we know that this is a very wrong interpretation of scriptures. The statement was made by Jesus as a reproof of the disciples who argued that the perfume used by the woman on Jesus was a waste and could have been sold and at a high price and the money given to the poor.

That is why the first statement in the preceding verse was "why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me." The argument of Jesus is that those who have a heart to do good should never complain for want of opportunity.[7]

As early as in the 16th century, the Poor Laws in England was enacted to provide assistance to the destitute.[8] During this period, many charitable organisations, religious institutions and local organisations arose to provide relief to the poor. The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new era in poverty eradication efforts with the establishment of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions (International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank). The Marshall Plan launched in 1948 as a US initiative to aid Western Europe's economic recovery had a large international aid component.[9] The 1960s and 1970s saw a wave of decolonisation leading to the emergence of newly independent states in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. The creation of the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) in 1965 was aimed at pushing development efforts globally.[10] The 1980s were characterised by economic crisis in many developing countries leading to the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed by the IMF and World Bank. The implementation of SAP in sub-Saharan Africa led to increased poverty and inequality as public spending on health, education and social services were reduced on the instruction of IMF and World Bank.[11]

In the 1990s, there was a shift towards a more holistic approach to development. The UNDP introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 highlighting the importance of education, health and living standards.[12] This shift emphasized that development should focus on improving people's lives rather than focus on economic growth or GDP. This is why some scholars talk about holistic development which is a shift from focus on economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to well being. The idea is to harmoniously advance the well being of both people and the planet. Other scholars have developed what is called Gross National Happiness with nine pillars: Health; Education; Living standards; Psychological well being; Time use; Ecological Diversity and resilience; Community vitality; Cultural Diversity and Resilience; and Good governance.

In 2000, world leaders adopted the Millenium declaration leading to the establishment of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight goals of the MDG were meant to address the various dimensions of poverty including hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease, environmental sustainability and global partnership.[13] By 2015, the goals of the MDG were not met and the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs aim to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions by 2030 while addressing issues such as inequality, climate change and peace and justice.[14] At the present rate, we are unlikely to meet the SDGs by 2030. However, there is sufficient knowledge today on what can be done to eradicate poverty and inequality. A big blow can be dealt on poverty and inequality through inclusive growth and job creation, inclusive governance and citizen engagement, social protection policies and programmes, addressing environmental challenges including climate change, youth and women empowerment, leveraging technology, addressing issues of security and focusing on education, health, agriculture and infrastructure. The challenge is the leadership, strategy and the right method of organizing to ensure that political leaders, political parties, government, private sector, development workers and whole of society focus on what needs to be done.

The concept of Social Justice has attracted the attention of several scholars and philosophers for the past three centuries- Thomas Paine, John Rawls, John Stuart Mill etc. **Social Justice is a concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society measured by distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity and privileges**.[15] There are several institutions in society that mediate social justice including taxation, social insurance, public health, public school, public services, labour laws and regulation of markets to ensure fair distribution of wealth and equal opportunities. The struggle for equity and justice among humans historically started with the division of society into classes.[16] Social Justice entails even distribution of wealth and opportunities. Therefore, in a society where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, Social Justice ensures that there are policies and programmes that will lead to redistribution of wealth. The state can make this happen by intervening in the economy.

The path of the struggle for Social Justice have been paved by Philosophers (John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel kant); labour movement; civil society movements; feminist movements; anti-apartheid movements etc. Current efforts at social justice include utilisation of international frameworks and standards such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national policies and legislations that promote social welfare systems. Globally, CSOs have been in the forefront of advocacy for social justice, providing services and holding government accountable.

The path to poverty eradication and social justice has been blocked by elite capture of the state. This is not what can be corrected by a few people. What we need is a movement. We have always argued that change will happen in any society when the conditions are ripe.[17] In our view, for change to occur in any society requires the presence of objective and subjective conditions. **Objective conditions** exist when situations are evidently abnormal with huge contradictions which can only be resolved by change. The subjective conditions are the organizational preparations required to bring about change. There is no doubt that the objective conditions for change have been existing in Nigeria for a very long time. There is high level of poverty in the midst of plenty. Corruption is widespread, endemic and stifling progress. The wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of a few. There is social disintegration with high levels of promiscuity and divorce. Rape is on the increase. There are several cases of incest. There is high level of greed, selfishness and nepotism. The state of affairs is not sustainable. The challenge has been the absence of the subjective conditions with the requisite organization and platform to mobilize for social change.

5. SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANISING, POVERTY ERADICATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social Movements have historically played pivotal roles in poverty eradication and social justice. By mobilising communities for social change and advocating for systemic change and holding duty bearers accountable, social movements contribute to poverty eradication and social justice. Poverty eradication efforts are critical for achieving social justice as poverty is both a cause and consequence of social inequities. Social movements advocate for policies that address the root causes of poverty and injustice.[18] Social movements raise awareness about social injustices and the structural factors contributing to poverty.[19] By challenging existing power structures and advocating for

systemic reforms, social movements help create institutional changes that promote poverty eradication and social justice.[20]

From the above, it is clear that the path to poverty eradication and social justice is clear and known. Similarly, the conditions for change to happen in any society is well documented. The challenge has always been the leadership, strategy, commitment and methods to get this done. Over the years, there has been different approaches to development work. We can delineate at least four distinct approaches to development work by CSOs. First there, are CSOs who utilise the welfare/service delivery approach. This approach seeks to provide short term relief to the poor and excluded or to people in emergency situations. This approach merely provides relief and does not look at the factors, structures and institutions that created the problem in the first instance. This approach provides temporary relief to the poor and excluded but will not lead to poverty eradication because it does not tackle the root causes of poverty. Secondly, there are CSOs who go beyond the provision of relief to build the capacity of communities to deal with situations in which they find themselves. For instance, the CSOs will seek to enable communities to improve their agricultural systems so as to deal with the problem of food shortage. Initially, this approach to development was largely externally driven. Thirdly, there are CSOs who utilise the participatory development approach. This approach to development improves on the development approach by giving room for the poor and excluded to participate in the definition of the problem as well as designing context specific responses to the problem. Finally, there are CSOs who utilise the rights based approach, a participatory development approach that recognizes the rights of the poor and excluded people as well as the duty of government to meet these rights. RBA recognizes that the poor and excluded people are entitled to fundamental human rights solely by reason of being human. These rights are not privileges. They are not depended on grace or benevolence of rulers. These rights are fundamental, inalienable, universal, interdependent and indivisible. The RBA is premised on the recognition that the rights of individuals impose obligations on the State. It is widely recognized that states have obligations in civil and political rights. But some people argue that there are less obligations in terms of social and economic rights. But we argue that there are three levels of obligations in matters of social and economic rights: obligations to respect, protect and fulfill. The obligation to respect requires states to refrain from interfering with social and economic rights e.g. refrain from forced eviction. The obligation to protect requires states to prevent violations by third parties e.g. ensure that private employers comply with labour standards. The obligation to fulfill requires states to take appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and other measures towards the full realization of such rights. It is important to note that apart from the State, other duty bearers are necessary in every society for the enjoyment of rights. These include individuals, families, communities, CSOs, donor agencies, international community and the private sector. The role of CSOs in RBA is to create awareness, educate in rights and obligations, build capacity of rights holders, organize and mobilize rights holders, advocate for pro-poor policies and provide alternatives. Whenever services are provided by CSOs, it should be to serve as entry points for the CSOs to perform the roles mentioned above more effectively. It is apt to note that there is a culture that is required to deliver RBA including the need to act as facilitators, enablers or catalyst, empowering others, persistency, analysis and activism. RBA requires challenging of structures and powers of oppressive State officials and institutions as well as traditional systems with

risks of possible arrest, intimidation and repression from the state and traditional structures. It therefore requires skills in mobilization, campaigning, advocacy, analysis, communication, research, networking and activism.

ActionAid was founded in 1972 as a British charity by Cecil Jackson-Cole with the primary goal of providing long term development assistance to impoverished communities. In 1972, it started work in India and Kenya. In 1974, it expanded its operations to Rwanda, The Gambia and Uganda. In 1999, it started its operations in Nigeria. Today, Action Aid is an international organisation operating in over 70 countries with affiliates all over the world. ActionAid started with service delivery. In 1999, there was a major change to rights-based approach. Now, the emphasis is on social movement organising.

6. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Globally, ActionAid has been in the forefront of efforts to eradicate poverty and injustice. Since its formation in 1972, it has worked tirelessly to advocate for the rights of the poor and excluded people and influence policy changes that foster equity and social justice. In Nigeria, Action Aid has demonstrated its commitment to eradication of poverty and injustice. ActionAid Nigeria was established in 1999 and registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 2007. The first Strategy was developed in 2004 titled Fighting Poverty in the Midst of Plenty (2004-2008). The second strategy was developed in 2009 titled Fighting Poverty in the Midst of Plenty II (2009-2013). The third strategy was developed in 2014 titled Take Action Now: End Poverty (2014-2018). The fourth strategy was developed in 2018 titled Social Justice to end Poverty (2018-2023). The strategy we are launching today is the fifth strategy.

The launch of this new Country Strategy Paper signifies a renewed commitment to eradication of poverty and injustice, reflecting a deep understanding of the evolving dynamics of poverty and injustice in our country. The new strategy recognises that the fight against poverty and injustice cannot be waged by a single entity or through isolated efforts. It requires a collective action-a movement of people united against poverty and injustice. In order to do this involves empowering citizens, strengthening governance, advancing economic justice, promoting social justice and building resilience. ActionAid and partners will need to organise and mobilise communities to foster grassroots movements; act as catalysts for change; shift mindset, policies and practices and help to build a Nigeria that thrives -where poverty is eradicated, justice prevails and every individual has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. The strategy is hinged on solidarity and collective action and hopes to lift five million people out of poverty.

As noted above, social movement organising can contribute a lot to poverty eradication and social justice. But it must be recognised that social movement organising is not sufficient to bring about change required to eradicate poverty and injustice.

7. BEYOND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANISING

In addition to Social Movement organising, there are many other things that we need to do to bring about the change to eradicate poverty and injustice. First and foremost, we need to change the way politics is played in Nigeria. We need to fix the politics dominated by "uncivil" people whose interest is looting and brigandage. The beginning point is that

decent, hard working and God-fearing professionals must participate in politics. It was Plato who counselled us that "if you refuse to participate in politics, you will be ruled by your inferiors." Edmund Burke admonished us that for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. Frantz Fanon warned us that the future will have no pity for those men and women who possessing the exceptional privilege of being able to speak the words of truth to their oppressors have taken refuge in attitude of passivity, of mute indifference and in some cases of cold complicity. Frantz Fanon argued that any bystander is either a coward or a traitor. It has to be recognised that the ruling class will never relinquish power on its own accord.[21] This will require taking over of power by coalition of patriots and democrats and the establishment of democratic institutions that will work in favour of the people.

Secondly, there is the need for a developmentalist coalition to pursue the deepening of democracy that will translate to development in a manner that will eradicate poverty and injustice. As Omano Edigheji has argued, throughout history, the ideology of development nationalism has been a major impetus for national development, especially in late developers (such as China, Malaysia, Mauritius, South Korea and Singapore) that wants to "catch-up".[22] For Nigeria, he argues that:

> Among other things, this calls for the creation of a developmentalist coalition that is made up of a few political elite, the top echelon of the bureaucracy and patriotic business elite. Given the diverse ethno-religious composition of Nigeria, efforts should be made to ensure that the developmental coalition comprises of people from the various ethnic and religious groups. This could be the basis to build a truly united country, as a sure guarantee to overcoming the ethno-religious conflicts that have plagued the country. The developmental coalition should be an elite group united mainly by the need for Nigeria's development, and consequently they have to be highly nationalistic and patriotic. In light of this, transforming the structure of the Nigerian economy, and consequently, enhancing its productive capacity should constitute the primary objective the developmentalist coalition. To this would require that promotion of industrial development should be accorded a national priority. A first step in this regard will be the formulation of an industrial policy, which among other things will identify industries for government support with clear targets, including technological upgrading, adaption and innovation, job creation and exports requirement.[23]

 A patriotic nationalist developmentalist coalition with a shared vision for national development working with social movements can counteract the elite capture that we are currently witnessing in Nigeria.

Thirdly, there is the need to develop transformative leaders especially in the political arena. **Leadership has been recognised as one of the most important variables that affect the performance of any organisation, institution or nation**. Study after study, superior financial and organisational performance, as well as other forms of success, have been linked to leadership.[24] Scholars have opined that the success or failure of organisations and nations depends on leadership excellence and not managerial acumen.[25] It has been documented that the progress, development and fortunes of many nations are tied to the type and quality of the political leadership that they have had and

continue to have.[26] In a survey of 1,767 experts across the world, 86 percent of the respondents agreed that the world is facing a leadership crisis.[27] According to Myles Munroe, the world is filled with followers, supervisors and managers but very few leaders.[28] Chinua Achebe argued that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian Character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else."[29] But scholars have documented that scourges of bad leadership and signs of darkened mood are everywhere in Nigeria.[30] Despite the recognition that Leadership is crucial for the development of organisations and nations and that leaders can be trained, there are very few organisations especially in Africa dedicated to grooming leaders.

 Myles Munroe put it aptly:

> There is leadership potential in every person. Despite this universal latent ability, very few individuals realise this power, and fewer still have responded effectively to the call. As a result, our nations, societies and communities are suffering from an astounding leadership void.[31]

This is why all efforts must be stepped up to build strategic leadership for sustainable development in Africa.

Fourthly, there is the need to give more attention to strategy. It is well established that strategy is very crucial to the development and performance of any nation. Strategy occupies a central position in the focus and proper functioning of any country. This is because it is a plan that integrates the nation's major goals, policies and action into a cohesive whole. A well formulated strategy should therefore help to marshal and allocate a state's resources into a unique and viable posture based on its relative internal competencies and shortcomings and anticipated changes in the environment. Strategies help to create a sense of politics, purpose and priorities.[32] The development strategy of a country is a comprehensive policy document that identifies the priority areas of the country, the resources available in the country and how to harness the resources to bring about improvement in the life of the citizens. It contains clear priorities, targets, programmes and strategies. The strategy of a country should draw some inspiration from international and national projections that will inspire the people to put up effort. It has been shown that development can be accelerated if there is political will combined with good policy ideas which are then translated into nationally owned, nationally driven development strategies guided by good science, good economics and transparent accountable governance.[33] There is the need for African countries to give more attention to the development of strategies.

Fifthly, there is the need to promote appropriate development approaches for Nigeria and indeed for the whole of Africa. As Fantu Cheru has argued, what is needed in Africa today are more "common sense" approaches that open up new avenues for increased productivity, by laying conditions for development through improved governance, increased investment in education and infrastructure, and improved access of the poor to productive assets and information.[34]

Furthermore, development work should be guided by a decolonisation agenda. Decolonisation agenda is one formulated to address the negative impact of colonialism.[35] Colonisation began in the late 19th Century by European powers including

Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain who sought to expand their empires and exert control over African territories. Colonisation had negative effects on the colonised especially in terms of conception of power and how it is used; legitimisation of western knowledge as the only valid one; colonial mentality and inferiorisation of oppressed groups and extraction of natural resources from the colonised territories leading to poverty and underdevelopment. It is therefore necessary to revisit social work practice (encompassing social development work) in Nigeria to be conversant or cognisant of the history, sensitivities and perceptions of the indigenous peoples or communities in which the work is conducted. Decolonisation as a theory focuses on challenging the colonial and imperialist perspectives on Africa and Africans. It seeks to debunk hegemonic discourses in Africa by continually opposing and resisting those notions that cast Africans as primitive and backward. It has been argued that colonial exploitation and resource extraction contributed to poverty in colonised territories including Nigeria. The legacy of colonialism affected the way formerly colonised peoples acquire knowledge, understand their history, comprehend their world and define themselves. This is why decolonisation is important to address land distribution policies, educational systems, economic policies, trade relationships and international partnerships. For Nigeria, decolonisation will mean addressing poverty and reshaping power dynamics through alternative development strategies, preserving cultural identity, promoting indigenous education, establishing transparent governance, ensuring equitable power distribution, redefining international relations and challenging colonial biases. This will also mean not depending on aid for development, indigenisation of social work practice and Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI). There are lessons from philosophical thoughts in Nigeria such as the concept of *Omoluabi* in Yoruba land which is founded on the principles of respect, equitable wealth distribution and social justice. Drawing from this, development workers in Nigeria can focus on people (respectful relations and collaboration), place (context and language), expectation (shared goals and shared benefits), framework (participation, cooperation and collectivism), data production strategies (field work, observations, folklore, songs, artefacts and dance), ethics (community led and community values), and representations (capacity, knowledge and skills transfer). It is recognised that decolonisation intervention should take cognisance of unique challenges and opportunities in different contexts. A decolonised methodology for social development challenges Eurocentric and general western methods which otherwise undermine local knowledge and experiences of the marginalised population groups. Therefore, social development workers in their work not only recognise the negative effects of colonisation on power, gender, knowledge, colonial mentality and exploitation but should adopt new approach to development work that prioritises alternatives, power analysis, indigenous knowledge, GESI, rights based approach and local ownership. Social development workers should recognise that decolonisation go through phases of rediscovery and recovery; mourning; dreaming/visioning; commitment and action.

Development partners, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and faith based organisations (FBOs) have great roles to play in decolonisation efforts. Development partners can facilitate collaborative processes, support locally led initiatives, challenge assumptions and values, lobby for policy changes and engage in truth and reconciliation. INGOs can play a vital role of fostering decolonisation by taking practical steps such as adopting locally relevant approaches and challenging current

strategies and approaches through a decolonisation lens. FBOs can contribute to decolonisation by reassessing their world views, participating in collaborative processes and establishing decolonisation practices. An important aspect of decolonisation is Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). Decolonisation cannot be divorced from the complex web of intersecting identities including race, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status(class). Recognising these intersections is paramount for crafting policies and interventions that address the unique challenges faced by different groups. There is therefore the need for inclusive policies, incorporation of diverse voices, investment in capacity building and inclusive monitoring, evaluation and learning. There are huge economic and social benefits of decolonisation including increased self-sufficiency and economic growth; reduction in exploitation and resource drain; increased trade and investment opportunities; enhanced cultural identity and pride; improved access to education and healthcare and increased political participation and representation.

Finally, we must learn how to organise to change society. Organising for change has its own strategies, tactics and dynamics. It does not come from a few workshops, few tweets and few demonstrations. It is not a dash. It is a marathon.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. The path to poverty eradication and social justice has been tortious and appears blocked by elite capture of the state. But there are possibilities with the level of knowledge and recognition of new ways of organising that have the potential to change things for better.

As we launch the ActionAid Nigeria's new Country Strategy Paper today, I urge all stakeholders to join hands in this historic and critical endeavour to change course and change the narratives. The task ahead is formidable but not insurmountable. If we face the challenges with catalytic partnership, collective action, unwavering commitment and social movement organising, we can make significant strides where poverty and injustice are relegated to history.

Let us draw inspiration from the resilience and tenacity of the communities and the poorest of the poor that we work with. Let us be encouraged that every step and action taken towards poverty eradication, justice and equity, no matter how small contribute to the larger goal of a just and prosperous society.

Another Nigeria is not just a possibility but an imperative!

God bless you all.

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