

Change Mantra in Nigeria: The Promises and Expectations

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Abstract

This paper assessed the change mantra in Nigeria. The change mantra is not an entirely new lexicon in the Nigerian political lexicography but became pronounced after the emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as a political party in 2014. Change was defined to mean a movement from an original state of affairs to a new and or different state, indicating that change could be positive or negative. Positive change is transformational in nature and content causing an upward movement from a state of disrepair, abandonment and generally undesirable to one of repair and generally more desirable. The All Progressives Congress was defined to mean an amalgam of strange bird fellows. The man President Muhammadu Buhari has served in various capacities as an Officer in the Nigerian Army and until now was seen as a no-nonsense man. Upon his emergence as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, expectations were high based on the change he and his party promised. Thus this paper appraised the change mantra in Nigeria, juxtaposing it with the experience of Tanzania under President Mugulifi. The conclusion drawn is that, except in the fight against terrorism, the change government in Nigeria under Buhari has not performed too well, but that there is room for improvement given that the government is just about two years.

Introduction

The change mantra is not an entirely new lexicon in the Nigerian political lexicography, it perhaps became pronounced after the emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as a political party registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2014. The APC projected a presidential candidate in the person of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari for the 2015 presidential election, who brought with him his change agenda as was enshrined in his previous electioneering campaigns with the defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), on which platform he contested the 2011 presidential election. Hence, "Change" became the main vehicle upon which the party rode to power. However, up to this moment the meaning of this "Change" remains elusive to the

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majority of Nigerians. Also, most of the younger Nigerians, who participated massively in the 2015 elections knew very little or nothing about the man who “bear” the change mantra – Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, and the platform APC, which was an amalgam of “strange bird fellows” in the eyes of many. It is on that note that in the following few paragraphs the concepts of APC, Buhari and Change are clarified to make for better appreciation of the subject.

APC – All Progressive Congress as noted earlier is an amalgam of strange bird fellows – Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Congress for Progressives Change (CPC), a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and the breakaway “decampers” of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The APC was formed and registered by INEC in 2014 leading to the elections in 2015. The leading political figures who championed the amalgamation of the parties (formation of the APC) were Alh. Ahmed Bola Tinubu a former governor of Lagos State; Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, a former Governor of the defunct North-Eastern state, Petroleum Minister and Head of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria – December 1983 to August 1985; Ogbonnaya Onu a former Governor of Abia state February 1992 to December, 1993 and one time Chairman of the ANPP; Atiku Abubarka, former Governor- Elect of Adamawa State in 1999 but became the Vice President 1999 to 2007; Dr. Bukola Saraki, former Governor of Kwara state, and Rochas Okorocha two times presidential candidate and now Governor of Imo state.

The APC became the main opposition party in Nigeria after its formation and subsequent registration. They opposed several policies of government, notable among which was the petroleum subsidy removal on the grounds of massive corruption and wrong timing. The party therefore sought to dislodge the then ruling party-PDP hence, it campaigned on the slogan of change leading to the 2015 general elections, with Gen. Muhammadu Buhari as its presidential flag bearer. The APC subsequently won the presidential election, thus changing its status from that of an opposition to that of a ruling party.

The man Gen. Muhammadu Buhari was born on December 17, 1942. He is a native of the Fulani town Daura situated in Katsina state of Nigeria. Buhari joined the Nigerian Army in 1962. He became the governor of the North-Eastern State and was later appointed Federal Commissioner for Petroleum and Natural Resources in 1976. When the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation was created (established) in 1977, Muhammadu Buhari was made the head. On December 31, 1983, the government of the civilian President Shehu Shagari was removed in a coup d'etat and Major-General Buhari was selected by the high ranking military officials to lead the country. The then Federal Government, led by General Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon introduced a public campaign against indiscipline known as "War Against Indiscipline" (WAI). This initiative was highly commended by Nigerians because it brought sanity to the system.

Muhammadu Buhari was admired by many for his uprightness and stand against corruption. His government rejected the IMF loan and refused to adopt IMF directives which include devaluation of the Naira. The regime was criticized for moves to silence critics of the administration, as decrees were promulgated curbing press freedom and allowing for opponents to be detained up to three months without formal charges. The regime also banned industrial actions such as strikes and lockouts by civil servants.

In 1994 Gen. Muhammadu Buhari was appointed by the Abacha's administration as the Chairman of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), a body funded from the revenues accruing from the increase in price of petroleum products, to use for developmental projects around the country.

Buhari contested the Presidential election as the candidate of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) in 2003 and lost. Gen. Buhari, in the 2007 April Presidential polls, again contested. His main contender then was the late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who is also from the same state - Katsina and he lost. In March 2010, Buhari left the ANPP for the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), a party that he had helped to found. He said that he had supported foundation of the CPC "as a solution to the debilitating, ethical and ideological conflicts in his former party the ANPP". Gen. Buhari was the CPC Presidential candidate in the April 16, 2011 general election, running against incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Ibrahim Shekarau of ANPP. Again he lost. In the year 2015, Muhammadu Buhari not deterred by his previous failures, contested for the Presidential election under the platform of the All Progressive Congress (APC) and after a very tight race with the incumbent, His Excellency, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari emerged the winner and was declared the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This was made possible because the Nigerian masses wanted change and they voted for change as Buhari had promised in his campaign. What then is this change?

Change from a general perspective is a condition of becoming different from a former order. Change could mean a movement from an original state of affairs to a new and or different state. The foregoing indicates that change could be positive or negative. Positive change is transformational in nature and content causing an upward movement from a state of disrepair, abandonment and generally undesirable to one of repair, concern and generally more desirable.

Thus, the change envisioned by Buhari and his party, APC can be drawn from their campaign promises to include zero tolerance for corruption, improved security conditions and a better state of the economy. Specifically, he promised to reduce the Naira –Dollar exchange rate from N197 per dollar to a naira per dollar, bringing back the Chibok school Girls within one hundred days in office, massive construction of road networks, upgrading the three existing refineries to operate at installed capacities and construction of new ones, reducing pump price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) from N87 per litre, increasing power generation from about 5000MW to 40,00MW etc. Currently, the country's power generating capacity is 2.9 mega watts.

The Change Mantra in Nigeria

The first visible change the electorate expected was the change in the caliber of people appointed into public offices. It was expected that Mr. President will appoint technocrats with proven integrity as a first step to fighting corruption. The list of ministerial nominees, which was presented to the National Assembly, after a long wait did not meet this expectation as a number of nominees who eventually became ministers were members of the PDP which the APC accused of corruption and impunity, and had been within the corridors

of power for the past sixteen years before the emergence of APC as the ruling party. For instance, Rotimi Amaechi, the immediate past governor of Rivers State and current Minister for Transport was indicted by a Judicial Panel of Enquiry in his state. He failed to appear before the panel to clear his name. During the screening the three senators from Rivers State raised serious issues against him yet Mr. President who rode to power on the back of change, insisted he should be cleared. Issues bordering on tax fraud were also raised by the National Assembly against Babatunde Fasola former governor of Lagos state and current Minister for Works, Power and Housing, Mr. President treated it with levity.

Another area of concern is the neglect of the constitution in appointments. The masses expected that Mr. President will protect the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the federal character principle as enshrined in the 1999 constitution as amended, to the latter. But this did not happen as most of the appointees are either his kinsmen, close relatives and at best retirees who were called back to head people in active service, examples of which are the Director of State Security Services (SSS) now code named Department of State Security (DSS) and the Comptroller General of the Nigeria Customs Services who is a retired Colonel of the Nigerian Army. The resultant effect is that those in active service may not grow to the peak of their career not due to any fault of theirs. The APC and Mr. President will argue that they are the best hands but the results are there for all to see, after about two years in office. Also, the Acting Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Mr. Ibrahim Magu (ACP), who has acted for more than six months, the prescribed period within which a person holding that office could have been nominated, was nominated by Mr. President as against the provisions of the constitutions. An investigation conducted by the DSS indicted Mr. Magu as being excessively corrupt, yet Mr. President is insisting that the National Assembly should screen and confirm his nomination as the EFCC Chairman.

In another development, the Secretary to Government of the Federation (SGF), Babachir Lawal has been alleged to have awarded contracts to his firms and that of his close associates, and purported to have diverted funds meant for the feeding of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the North-East for personal use. The allegations are very weighty. Mr. President rather than referring the matter to the specialised agencies of government like the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), EFCC, DSS and the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) which has the constitutional mandate to investigate such crimes, chose to use the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation (AGF), who is a member of the APC and, whose mandate does not include investigation but prosecution. This means the outcome of the investigation is known before it commences and that he the AGF has been given a clean bill just like Magu.

Fortunately, Tanzania like Nigeria has an administration that rose to power on the change mantra and has been on course in achieving the desired change for its citizenry. Upon inauguration of the Tanzanian Parliament on November 20, 2015 President Magulufi cut the budget for a state dinner from 300 million Tanzanian shillings to just 25 million shillings, ordering the balance to be used to buy hospital beds for Muhimbili hospital, which got 300 beds and mattresses and 600 bed sheets for the hospital (Omojalomoju, 2017).

Omojalomoju (2017) further reported as indicated in Box 1

BOX 1: Change Mantra: Like Tanzania, unlike Nigeria

Two different nations, two different administrations that rode to power based on promises to change the status quo, but similar idiosyncracies and characteristics. While one has started walking its talk, the other seemed yet to start. OLAJIDE OMOJOLOMOJU takes a look at the change mantra that brought the administrations of President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria and President John Magulufi of Tanzania and how they have fared in bringing about the desired change to their respective countries.

The Muhammadu Buhari-led Federal Government of the All Progressives Congress, (APC), rode to power on the back of the 'change mantra', promising Nigerians a change from what obtained in the past 16 years of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)-led administration. Nigerians keyed into the 'change' mantra, rejected the PDP and its presidential candidate, former President Goodluck Jonathan at the polls and instead voted for APC and Buhari and as they say, the rest is now history.

Just like Nigerians did, Tanzanians also went to the polls on the last Saturday of October in the fifth election to be held after the return to multi-party democracy in 1992 and on October 30th, the ruling party and its candidate, John Magulufi were declared winner of the election. Magulufi defeated former Prime Minister Edward Lowassa, who defected to the opposition Chadema Party after failing to secure the nomination of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). Immediate past President Jakaya Kikwete of the CCM was ineligible for reelection having been term banned, thus paving the way for the emergence of Magulufi, a former Works Minister, instead of the front runner Lowassa, who eventually like African politicians, defected to the opposition Chadema, which had once labelled him as "one of the most corrupt figures in Tanzanian society. He flew the opposition's flag in an election described as the most competitive and unpredictable in Tanzanian history. The difference, of course, was that while Nigerians made total and complete change from the old order to the new, Tanzanians retained the old but voted for new crop of politicians. Since inauguration, both Presidents Buhari and Magulufi have made sweeping policy decisions to return their countries to the path of honour and recovery from the woods, but the question is: has either Buhari or Magulufi in their policy decisions impacted positively on the lives of their countrymen and women and improve the lots of their respective countries?

On November 20, President Magulufi inaugurated the Tanzanian parliament and a state dinner that was supposed to cost 300 million Tanzanian shillings was planned. President Magulufi cut the budget to just 25 million shillings, ordering the balance to be used to buy hospital beds for Muhimbili hospital. That money got 300 beds and mattresses and 600 bedsheets for the hospital.

A day after the parliament inauguration, a group of 50 people were set for a tour of commonwealth countries, the purpose for the tour was actually unclear, but many of them actually thought it was going to be business as usual. Again, the President cut down the list to just four people, saving government about 600 million shillings in tickets, estacodes, accommodation and other costs. Two days later, on November 23, President Magulufi announced the cancellation of official ceremonies for independence anniversary scheduled for December 9. He declared that the money earmarked for such flamboyant celebration should be used to take care of pressing national issues and that December 9 should be devoted to cleaning up the environment. President Magulufi has also made some policy pro-

nouncements, including ban on foreign travels; no more first class or business class travel for government officials, except the President, Vice President and prime Minister; embargo on workshops and seminars in expensive hotels, when ministries have board rooms that can cater for such programmes; no more V8 utility vehicles for engineers when pick-up vans are more suitable for their jobs.

He has also cancelled payment of sitting allowances to all government officials, including members of parliament, MPs, wondering how they were paid allowances for jobs they draw monthly salaries for. He said that foreign embassies can handle whatever would warrant a government official to travel out of the country, adding that that was why the country have embassies in foreign countries. He added that if it is imperative for any official to travel, then permission must be sought from him or the Chief Secretary. A day after his inauguration, Magulufi was being conducted by officials round the State House when he decided to take a walk across to the Finance Ministry, asked why some employees were not at their desks and charged the staff to get their acts together and brace up for the challenges ahead. He also ordered the tax agency to scrap all tax exemptions and charged it to ensure that everybody, including the so called 'big guys' pay their taxes. The President undertook an unscheduled visit to the Muhimbili Hospital unannounced and walked through the worst parts of the hospital that is always kept hidden from important visitors like him. He immediately fired the hospital director, its board and ordered that all machines not working to be fixed within 14 days or else, the new director will be given the boot. The machines were put in shape within three days.

After his unscheduled visits to the Finance Ministry and the Muhimbili Hospital, the Tanzanian port, which has been said to be peopled by the 'most corrupt, delaying, thieving officials', all of a sudden became the most efficient government parastatal. No consignment is missing again and things get done quickly and the habit of forcing bribes out of patrons to get things done has disappeared. While going to officially declare parliament open, President Magulufi drove the 600 kilometres from Dar Es Salaam to Dodoma. He has also reduced the size of the presidential convoy and has also reduced the size of the presidential delegation that travels with him. When Magulufi was declared President-elect, people started congratulating him and wanted to bring gifts to his house; he turned them back, forbidding any visit and said that he would receive all congratulatory greetings on the phone.

As if all of these were not enough, Magulufi has thrown the spanners into the wheels of prominent politicians in Tanzania, who had been angling for the prime ministership, when he named a relatively unknown and unheard of fellow reputed for hard work and zero tolerance for corruption as Prime Minister, leaving the big boys angling for the post to wonder what hit them. He has also pronounced that all individuals and firms that bought state-owned enterprises that were privatised but have failed to do anything after about 20 years later, should either revive those enterprises or hand them back to government. With his body language and policy direction and pronouncement, president Magulufi has literally pressed the reset button; returning Tanzania to her default factory settings, taking the country back to the Tanzania Julius Nyerere left behind. Back home, things are changing, but not fast enough. President Buhari, known for his zero tolerance for corruption has actually brought about some changes in the polity, but need to do more and take more decisive actions to bring Nigeria back from the brink.

Perhaps, the Buhari administration may have to borrow a leaf from Magulufi and redirect Nigerians' focus and attitude, as many are yet to come to terms that it is no longer business as usual. The President's body language has in no small measure brought about some visible changes, but the administration needs to do more to restore Nigerians' confidence in it. The Buhari administration has taken some steps and far reaching policies, among which is the Treasury Single Account (TSA), which compels payment of all government revenue into just one account, to block all the sources of wastage's and stealing. But government needs to do more, especially as the people's confidence is daily being eroded by some of its steps and inactions. The President has also initiated some cost saving measures, especially those that are in sync with his personal idiosyncrasies of frugal existence, like attempts to merge ministries as a way of curtailing spiralling public expenditures and has embarked on cutting down of the number of Nigeria's missions abroad.

His fight against corruption is also targeted at recovering huge amounts that have been looted from the commonwealth and make the funds available to make life meaningful for the ordinary Nigerians. But the truth is that, beyond what the Buhari administration has done so far, the administration is yet to achieve much in the area of redirecting the priorities of government, as the ordinary Nigerian is yet to feel any better than before the advent of the administration and there seems to be no plan whatsoever to ensure that their lives are better. For example, the Federal Government is yet to make any pronouncement or do anything while civil servants across the states are being owed salaries months on end. State governors are not left out in this nonchalant attitude to the welfare of the citizenry. Some of them even had the effrontery to declare that they might be unable to continue payment of the meagre monthly N18,000 minimum wage, which has been grossly inadequate to keep body and soul together, yet the governors corner billions as security votes and each meal they consume costs far above the monthly minimum wage they are reneging on paying. Some governors are spending billions to decorate their states, like Imo State governor, Rochas Okorocha, who spent millions of naira to decorate the state during the last Christmas while the state civil servants wallow in abject denial of backlog of salaries being owed them; Bauchi State governor, Mohammed Abdullahi Abubakar, doled out millions of naira for Quoranic recitation contests; Adamawa State governor, Muhammadu Umaru Jibrilla Bindo, spent a whopping N200 million on prayer warriors. These are taking place even after these governors have collected billions of Naira in bailout funds to cater for the clearance of the arrears of salaries they owed their civil servants.

Therefore, the current change in the East African nation of Tanzania, which like Nigeria, was a British colony and which like Nigeria, inaugurated a new government last October, deserves to be replicated in Nigeria. Not only for the above reasons and comparison, but also because the two countries are similar in certain areas, especially in the years leading to the inaugurations of the two new administrations: like Nigeria, Tanzania has been weighed down by corruption, both in its public and private sectors, while priorities in the public sector had been stood on its head by corrupt public officers who have been bleeding the system to death. Also, the newly elected Tanzanian President Magulufi, like Buhari, promised to bring about a change all that during his electoral campaigns, has effectively started to achieve that from his first day in office.

Our own President Buhari has to wake up and restore confidence of Nigerians not only in his government but also his party, the APC.

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By: OLAJIDE OMOJOALO MOJU

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What is apparent from the ensuing argument in the box suggests that the Tanzanian change mantra appeared to be on the positive strand while that of Nigeria tends to be in the negatives.

Further examples of the outcome of the change mantra in Nigeria abound. Currently, not only has the Naira weakened over the dollar but the exchange rate has become more volatile and more unpredictable; a dollar now exchanges for over N500. To stem the tide the government adopted a consumption theory which encourages Nigerians to consume made in Nigeria goods. But Mr. President travels outside the country more than he travels within. Upon inauguration, the Minister of state for petroleum and energy announced an increase in the pump price of PMS from N87.60 to N145 under the guise of price modulation without explaining to Nigerians whether or not subsidy has been removed from petroleum products. Electricity Tariff were increased and the Minister claimed that the existing price was no longer sustainable and that with the increased rate power supply was going to be more stable but the opposite is the case. The result is that the cost of doing business in Nigeria has increased along with transportation cost. This has resulted in increased price level (high inflation rates which is now about 15% from the single digit recorded at the inception of this change administration). Most of the state governments had unpaid salary arrears running up till December, 2016. Elections conducted by INEC under this change administration are mostly inconclusive and the INEC seem not to be independent.

In addition, the Federal Account Allocation Committee's (FAAC) meetings are now being held mid-way into the following month. This is in the midst of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy, which intention was not bad but has contributed significantly in slowing down economic activities across the country. The multiplier effect is late payment of salaries and other financial obligations by state and federal governments. The TSA has also contributed in creating idle funds which hitherto would have been channeled through commercial (deposit money) banks for productive activities.

On the positives, the major plank is on the fight against terrorism in the north-east and resurgent militia groups in the south-south. The military under the change regime has been able to recover all territories forcefully occupied by Boko Haram terrorists in the North-East, including the Sambisa forest which had been the hideout (territory) of the terrorists. Kidnapping and Pipeline vandalization had become heightened shortly after the inauguration of the change administration but the effort of the Military, particularly the Nigerian Navy has yielded positive results but more is still needed to be done to consolidate on these results. The Change administration has also provided bailout funds and made it possible for state governments to use the Paris Club refunds to pay salary arrears. Some state governments, like Bayelsa state failed to utilize the funds for that purpose.

Concluding Remarks

The conclusion that can be drawn from the ensuing discussion is that the change mantra in Nigeria seems to have generated more negatives than positives. However the Change government must be given the benefit of doubt for the fact it has been in power for

close to two years and that this time frame may not be enough to achieve all of the change it promised the electorate.

On the fight against insurgency, the military is doing well but it is my opinion that the rights of unarmed civilians are being infringed upon in some situations and the rules of engagement are not strictly adhered to, particularly the recent bombing of over 1500 internally displaced persons by the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) fighter jets and the case of Gbaramatu in Delta State also readily comes to mind. To consolidate on the progress achieved so far the military must be funded and equipped adequately, the NPF and other paramilitary agencies must be strengthened. Also, the military should engage more on intelligence gathering as the terrorist and militia groups who have been dislodged from their hideouts may try to engage society using unconventional methods. The military must also be nonpartisan in its operations in protecting the territorial integrity of the country which is their traditional role, and of course protecting the hard earned democracy.

Furthermore, the Niger Delta terrain which has been ravaged by poverty, many years of armed struggle, poor health conditions and many years of neglect needs to be handled with care especially, as the "hen that lays the golden egg". Government at the central, state and local level must have the political will to deliver the democratic dividends to the people. A situation where state governments like Bayelsa cannot pay her workers especially, not including staff salary of the Niger Delta University in her 2017 budget is an imminent security threat. This will also engender the process of development of underdevelopment.

The recent effort of the Navy (Central Naval Command, Yenagoa) in bringing succor to rural dwellers in Bayelsa state is commendable. The Navy has recently been engaged in extending hands of fellowship to rural dwellers in Bayelsa state by providing free medical services in Yenagoa, and Otuan. Okumbiri is the 9th community to have benefited from the programme under the leadership of Admiral M. S. Garba, Commander Central Naval Command.

To forestall positive change, the change government must have the political will to implement the recommendations of the National Political Reform Conference. This will ensure that Presidents, Vice Presidents, Governors and their Deputies are stripped off the immunity they enjoy and can therefore be held accountable for the actions or inactions while in office.

Concerning the change begins with me slogan the government must be seen to setting the pace, leading the way in changing from luxurious, flamboyant and extravagant life style to one that is modest. Taking a lead from the President Mugulifi of Tanzania, the president should cut down his foreign trips, estacodes, lead the way in consuming made in Nigeria products including medical checkups and treatments, college and university education. Also, appointments into public offices should be based on the federal character principle and merit, rather than family ties. Hence, the change should begin with the government not the individuals. It has to follow the top-bottom approach.

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