



***‘Promoting Transparency and Accountability through the Open
Government Partnership’***

Keynote Address

By

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At the

***1st Meeting of the National Steering Committee of the
Open Government Partnership (OGP), Nigeria
Sheraton Hotel, Abuja***

14th March, 2017

Protocol

Introduction

1. Permit me to welcome my colleague Ministers/members of the Federal Executive Council, the civil society organization co-chair and non-state actors to the first National Steering Committee of the Open Government Partnership in Nigeria. Thank you for all your support towards making open government a success in Nigeria.

2. As you are all aware, corruption remains one of the biggest impediments to national development. It concerns actions that are often clandestine and practices that those who perpetrate it always try to conceal. It is now acknowledged that many of the political, social and especially economic problems we face in Nigeria is traceable to the problem of corruption.

3. Against this background, His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari has left no one in doubt that he is committed to making governance in Nigeria more open, accountable and responsive to citizens.

4. In May, 2016, the President attended the international Anti-Corruption Summit organised by the government of the United Kingdom where he reaffirmed his commitment to strengthen anti-corruption reforms **through implementing programs aimed at:**

a) Exposing Corruption

b) Punishing the corrupt and providing support to victims who have suffered from corruption; and

c) Driving out the culture of corruption

5. Flowing from these commitments, the federal government sought to deepen institutional and policy reforms and this led to Nigeria joining the ***Open Government Partnership (OGP)***.

6. The Open Government Partnership is a multi-stakeholder initiative focused on ***improving transparency, accountability, citizen participation and responsiveness to citizens through technology and innovation.***

Nigeria formally joined the initiative as the 70th country in July, 2016 and many civil society organisations across the world are members of the initiative, representing about one third of the world population.

7. President Muhammadu Buhari has also approved ***the OGP National Steering Committee*** - most of who are gathered in this room, with the Federal Ministry of Justice as the coordinating Ministry. As shown in the attached list of the Steering Committee members, this Committee is made up of representatives of government Ministries, Agencies, Departments (MDAs) as well as civil society organizations, organized private sector and professional associations who already worked together to ***co-create a two-year National Action Plan (NAP) to mainstream transparency mechanisms in the management of public funds across all sectors and citizen engagement. Most recently, the OGP Working Groups.***

8. Progress made by Nigeria since joining OGP:

- a) The Federal Government of Nigeria has commenced consultation on the implementation of the ***Beneficial Ownership Transparency.*** President Buhari has presented the Money Laundering Prevention and Prohibition Bill, 2016 to the Nigerian Parliament. This Bill provides for a clear path towards a beneficial ownership transparency regime in Nigeria. The Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) is also reviewing its laws to make it possible to disclose the beneficial owners of companies and to set up a public register of beneficial owners. The Nigerian Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) is also working with the CAC to develop a register of beneficial owners of all companies operating in the Nigerian Extractive Industry and will soon make it public in line with global standards. Today, we will present a

policy paper on beneficial ownership and the lessons learnt from a recent study visit to the United Kingdom. You are welcome to provide comments on how Nigeria can best develop a system that will work for us.

- b) Let me also point out that Nigeria, (in addition to the UK government that commenced the implementation of beneficial ownership public register in 2016) would be among the first to commence a consultation process involving a **triangular process (Government, Business, and Civil Society) towards the establishment of a public register of beneficial owners**. The NEITI would also be among the first country to comply with the EITI requirement for the publication of beneficial owners operating in the oil and gas industry.
- c) In the area of **open contracting**, the President recently approved Executive Orders to improve transparency in government contracting. All contract bids are published regardless of the threshold and aggrieved bidders have opportunity to submit complaints to the Bureau for Public Procurement (BPP) - the ombudsman on public procurement in Nigeria. It is the BPP that determines when to set aside procurements that do not conform to the Public Procurement Act, 2007. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has adopted the open contracting standards in its operations. The BPP has also created a citizen-monitoring portal and is working closely with a lead CSO Group- PPDC in the development of its electronic procurement system.
- d) The Federal Ministry of Finance has just issued a **Whistle Blowers policy** that will enable voluntary disclosure of stolen assets or reporting by those who are aware that assets have been stolen. The application of this policy will ensure that administrative sanctions can be applied when public officials misuse public funds.
- e) The application of **the Freedom of Information Act** is becoming more robust and access to public information is increasing. The OGP Secretariat plans to train all relevant agencies to ensure effective application of the FOI law. In the coming weeks, we hope to work with the FMOJ in developing a circular that will be issued to all MDAs regarding the effective implementation of the FOI within their organizations.
- f) Plans are also underway to involve states in the signing of **subnational commitments**. Some states have indicated interest and willingness in

the Open government initiative. In this regard, the OGP Nigeria Secretariat plans to work closely with relevant States to support their application process. Just last month OGP Secretariat met with the **Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)** a department set up by the federal government with a special mandate for the development of the nine oil producing states in Nigeria.

- g) The government through the **Nigerian Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)** is also working on adopting a technology-based citizens' feedback on projects and programs within the OGP framework.
- h) The Government of Nigeria is investing in **technology and innovation** as a tool for fighting corruption. The introduction of the **Bank Verification Number, Treasury Single Account and the Integrated Payroll and Personnel information System (IPPIS)** are on-going efforts to ensure transparency in the management of public fund.
- i) The Ministry of Budget and National Planning through the Budget Office will soon **launch a citizens' portal where citizens can make enquiries, access budget documents and submit their feedback on projects and programs.**
- j) The Ministry of Budget and National Planning is also publishing budget figures and expenditures online or in national newspapers and citizens are always welcome to interrogate the use of public funds.
- k) There is intensified effort to integrate more **citizen participation and oversight in the budget making process and across all the commitments in the NAP.**
- l) For the first time, Nigeria's National Assembly held a three-day open session with citizens to review the 2017 budget -something that is unprecedented and we believe that this will open up Nigeria's budget making process for enhanced citizen's participation.
- m) The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) is currently working towards the **adoption of common reporting standards and the Addis Tax initiative aimed at improving the fairness, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of the tax system.**
- n) In line with commitment 5 of our NAP, **on ease of doing business**, the Presidential Advisory Council is undertaken work to update the 'ease of doing business assessment' through identifying existing blockages to ease of doing business in Nigeria as well as determine actions that can be taken to open Nigeria for investment and achieve an improved business environment.

o) We are the first country to recognize civil society as critical in the monitoring of recovered and returned stolen assets. Nigeria Network on Asset Recovery has participated actively in the negotiation of agreements for return of stolen assets thus setting a global standard.

9. I must admit, however, that despite all the achievements recorded so far, there is still so much work to be done to rebrand Nigeria by improving our performance in the World Bank's Ease of Doing business ranking, as well as our ranking in service delivery, citizen engagement, participation and rule of law.

10. I am convinced that our participation in the OGP process will provide the requisite hub of coordination, information sharing, innovation and cross-fertilization of ideas within government and with our global partners that will lead to better service delivery that our citizens yearn for.

11. The presence of all stakeholders in the OGP process in Nigeria including civil society organizations, professional associations, as well as the organised private sector in this meeting today is an eloquent testimony of your willingness to be part of this unique partnership.

12. Finally, it is worth noting that Nigeria's OGP NAP is a bold statement and tone from the top that shows our commitment to OGP principles of transparency, accountability and citizens' participation.

13. As a government, we shall remain focused, bold and result oriented in delivering on the promises President Muhammadu Buhari made to **provide good governance to the Nigerian people.**

Thank you.

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14th October 2017

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