

## Beautiful and Unbeautiful

Are the *beautiful* roads littered with *keke napeps* because that's the only job most youth can do? If yes, is that progress?

Beautiful roads. Neglected people.

The funny part is that this is one of the best-case scenarios. Most communities do not even have the roads and high-rise buildings and streetlights. But they still have the poor people.

Unbeautiful roads. Neglected people.

### **The more you look, the less you see.**

Remember when I said you had the right to food, health care, even unemployment benefits? Uhmhm, it is not exactly that way. Please let me explain. You deserve those rights, yes. Citizens of many other countries have those rights. But not Nigerian citizens. *Nahhh*. Talk to Nigeria about socioeconomic rights, and the country will be like, '*Ehn? Socio gini? What is that one? Abeg, park well.*'

Section 16 of the country's constitution requires the government to put the country's resources to good use in order to 'secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen'. The state is also to ensure that 'suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens'. No, I did not make all that up; it is the actual text of the Nigerian constitution, word for word. Even I was surprised when I stumbled upon it. *E shock you, abi? Ehn, chill first, I never finish*. Here's more from Section 17: the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens 'have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment'; 'the health, safety, and welfare of all persons in employment are safeguarded'; and 'there are adequate medical and health facilities for all persons'.

*Mhennn*, if only we could bring words to life! This is the

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constitution stipulating how things should be. *But*, you may ask, *you just said we don't have these rights in Nigeria. Ehm*, I know. I'm getting there.

See *ehm*, the drafters of the Nigerian constitution did not want to take any chances. Yes, they wrote those provisions, but they didn't give them the same status as rights. Nahhh. That would have been risky. You know why? If they were rights, citizens would have been able to bring cases against the government when those welfare provisions are not available. And the Nigerian government is not quite ready for that level of accountability.

So how did the drafters manage to insert these cosmetic provisions? Well, they created another category for them. These *rights* were not included in Chapter IV of the Constitution, which provides for 'Fundamental Rights'. No. Instead, they were carefully inserted in Chapter II, 'Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy'. I'll try and break the jargon down for you. Those provisions you have just read are mere *objectives* and *principles* that cannot be enforced in court. They are not *Fundamental Rights* like the ones in Chapter IV of the Constitution. No. They are just there like a wish list. The more you look, the less you see. This was why in 1981, the Court of Appeal held that courts could not enforce those objectives and principles. Only the legislature (National Assembly) and voters can do something about them.

So, there you have it.

Permit me to add that countries like South Africa and Kenya already protect these socioeconomic rights. Nigeria's own is to be shouting 'Giant of Africa! Giant of Africa!' with nothing to show for it. *Giant wey no dey see food chop, that one na giant?*

### Kim Jong-Un's personal toilet

Good health is better than riches. So they say, and I think I agree. Without good health, we cannot really enjoy riches, can we? And do

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we have the right to health in Nigeria? Oh, sorry, let me rephrase. Do we have the *objective* and *policy* of health in Nigeria? Or, better still, have previous and current governments met this objective? Are they even trying?

Wanna know what I think? Okay. Here it is: whether right, policy, or objective, we don't have anyone in Nigeria. What we have at best is a privilege—a chance at life. Survival of the fittest. After winning that fertilization race in the womb, you still have to come and run another survival race in Nigeria. And the Nigerian race is even more challenging.

You may not know this, but the rate of infant and maternal mortality in Nigeria is high—nothing indicative of a nation that cares about the wellbeing of its weakest members: babies. During my PhD research, I came across rather critical reports by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on the high infant mortality rate, especially in the northern part of the country. One 2015 report cited UNICEF rankings which placed Nigeria as the second largest contributor to the global under-five and maternal mortality rate. Read that again. Nigeria ranked number two for child mortality in the entire world. In a country where there is no war o (well, not if you count Boko Haram and 'unknown gunmen'). UNICEF data (2019) went further to show that 100 out of every 1000 live births would not reach the age of five.

Wherein lies the future of a country that, in the 21st Century, cannot care enough to provide adequate facilities for helpless children?

And do we even need to talk about the government hospitals and clinics? Right from a very young age, five or six, I learned that private clinics, even the smallest ones, were to be preferred to government ones. There was no point even going to the government hospitals when we were sick.

As if to emphasise the gross inadequacy of the Nigerian health

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sector, most politicians—those that should actually be providing these services—jet out of the country at the slightest sign of the mildest ailment. And when I say *most politicians*, I mean from local government chairpersons right up to the very top, the president. Yes. Nigerian presidents do not get treated in Nigeria. It is too risky for them. How can they commit their precious health to Nigerian hospitals?

Honestly, it is a big disgrace. I'll tell you why.

See, the president of a country should be the last person to fly abroad for a medical check-up. For one, it is a huge self-indictment. You are acknowledging before the world that you have failed to provide adequate health care. But that's by the way. There is another bigger reason. A president going abroad for a medical check-up is committing a huge security slip. He is putting his medical data and information in the hands of another country. In fact, he may be placing his life in the hands of that other country. Think about it. Have you heard that Russia's Putin went to the US or UK for a health check? How would that even sound to you? Do you think the Supreme Leader of Iran will go to the US for treatment? Or that the Queen of England will fly to America every week for a medical check-up?

In fact, let me give you one gist. Did you hear that when he went to Singapore to meet Donald Trump in 2018, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Un, went with his own toilet? You know why? He didn't want the West to know about his medical status or if he was suffering from a terminal illness (which they could find out by testing his stool). LOL! Imagine the length other world leaders can go to avoid their medical records falling into the hands of their rivals. *Think am nau*: is a country's national security not compromised when the president is at the mercy of another country's doctors?

*Nigerian presidents send you? Mfchew!* You are on your own. They don't even care. In 2009, there were reports that the then Nigerian

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President, Umaru Musa Yaradua, had died in a hospital in Saudi Arabia. For months, there was a palpable vacuum in the country's leadership as the president's whereabouts and state of health were largely unknown. Imagine that! Several months passed, and no Nigerian knew whether their president was dead or alive. In fact, the news of his death was broken by the foreign press.

A former first lady, Stella Obasanjo, also died in a hospital in Spain. In 2009, Maryam Babangida, wife of the former military Head of State, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, died in a hospital in the United States. In 2013, the former First Lady, Patience Jonathan, narrated how she passed out for seven days and almost died in a German hospital. In 2017, the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, spent several months in a London hospital, again sparking rumours of incapacity and even death. Around the same time, one of the president's sons was involved in a motorbike accident in Nigeria. He was swiftly flown abroad for treatment.

Now, there is no shame in falling ill or even dying. As humans, we are bound to fall ill from time to time and ultimately leave this earth at some point. But I think it is worrying that the people at the pinnacle of power cannot trust the national health service with their lives. If they can't, who should?

Mr Nigerian President. Mr Governor. How many world leaders come to your country for a check-up? Why are you disgracing yourselves and the rest of the country by junketing from one place to the other just to treat cough?

The worst is that Nigerian presidents have an exclusive State House Medical Centre, which receives a special and very generous allocation in the Nigerian budget. Yet, *dem no like am*. In 2017, the First Lady, Aisha Buhari, publicly decried the medical centre's management, stating that she and her husband, the president, were making frequent medical trips abroad simply because the medical centre, easily the most exclusive in the country, was not good

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enough. Hehe. Can you believe that? In fact, let me quote her word for word (not from a newspaper or from a publicly available video recorded at a public function):

*As you are all aware, for the last six months, Nigeria wasn't stable because of my husband's ill-health . . . If somebody like Mr President can spend several months outside Nigeria, then you wonder what will happen to a man in the street. Few weeks ago, I was sick as well. They advised me to take the first flight out to London; I refused to go. I said I must be treated in Nigeria because there is a budget for an assigned clinic to take care of us . . . Along the line, I insisted they call Aso Clinic to find out if the X-ray machine is working . . . I had to go to a hospital that was established by foreigners 100 per cent. What does that mean?*

This was the president's wife complaining or, as if her husband was not in charge. She was complaining about the inadequacy of an exclusive clinic allocated billions of naira in the national budget. What do we learn from that speech? We learn that as soon as anyone in the presidency takes ill, they are advised to fly immediately to London. What a disgrace! The president's wife even went on to assert that despite the huge, expensive constructions going on at this clinic, there was 'no single syringe' there. Where then do those allocated billions go?

I never knew a day would come when I'd have to say this, but Nigerian leaders could learn a thing or two from Kim Jong-Un.

## The pen and the sword

The pen, they say, is mightier than the sword. Sadly, most Nigerians do not even have a pencil *talk less* of a pen—no access to quality education. And the government acts surprised when the people carry swords in the form of banditry, Boko Haram, killer herdsmen,