



# From Darkness to Light:

The Long & Painful Struggle  
for Electricity in Nigeria

*A Publication of*  
THE KUKAH CENTRE



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## WELCOME TO THE PODIUM MONOGRAPH SERIES

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you the monograph from our inaugural *Podium* forum featuring the Honourable Minister of Works, Power and Housing, Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola, SAN.

*The Podium* is the cornerstone of the Kukah Centre's *Fixing Nigeria* Initiative that strives to provide a platform for robust but civil interrogation of public officials, key players in civil society as well as the organized private sector. The importance of such a mediating platform, especially for public officers is underscored by the great deal of cynicism towards government and the mutual distrust between public officials and citizens. The political class, the bureaucracy and the larger society seem to be constantly talking past one another with no clear and coordinated vision for a better society.

Through this initiative, **The Kukah Centre** hopes to elevate the quality of discourse in our country by generating policy ideas through robust and informed engagement between public officials and citizens and in the process deepening our nascent democracy. The overall goal is to build trust between government and the people and together find solutions to the myriad problems plaguing our dear country. This is clearly reflected in the optimistic theme- *Fixing Nigeria*- which we have chosen for this

initiative as we remain confident that Nigeria can and must be fixed.

At the forum held on June 16, 2016, the Honourable Minister shared this optimism by laying out a very bold framework for addressing Nigeria's massive infrastructural challenges, particularly in the power sector hence the title of the monograph- *From Darkness to Light*.

We plan to revisit the benchmarks he has clearly laid out to assess the progress made in the three critical sectors under his portfolio- Power, Works and Housing.

**Arthur-Martins AGINAM**  
*(Executive Director)*

## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT:

### *The Long & Painful Struggle for Electricity in Nigeria*

For a polity which has been starved of the qualitative conversation envisaged by The Kukah Centre, the June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016 inaugural encounter at the centre's flagship platform, **The Podium** provides a jump off point in measuring the prospects of deliberate investment in the dialogic enterprise as a way out of collective doom. Coming a week after the Centre for Democracy and Development, (CDD)'s Buharimeter Town Hall Meeting, **The Podium** presage the restoration of the culture of productive interface between power and the people. Ironically, it was under the first Buhari regime that this culture suffered the most intense formal assault when seminars, workshops and symposia became grand theatres for enacting the state by the defunct NSO. It is an interesting about-turn that in his second coming, Buhari seems to have turned a new leaf from a sense of power that made him to be reckoned with as a problem even for the establishment and the establishment a problem for him too.

But how substantive is the change? What did the regime bring to the conversation and what did the people tell the regime back? Babatunde Fashola, the Minister for Works, Power and Housing or whichever order you take it, was the face of the government at

**The Podium.** He had five persons who went by the collective label of interlocutors to interrogate him. That was in addition to questions from the floor before the occasion wound up from the shortest remarks Bishop Kukah, the founder of The Kukah Centre, must have made in public speaking. It was a strictly two-hour affair attended by academics, politicians, technocrats, diplomats, members of the policy community, the clergy and labour leaders.

As the sole actor on **The Podium**, Fashola had the solidarity of time to clarify, disagree, assert and propagate the divergent elements of the story of the regime's technocratic lens to the crisis of infrastructure in Nigeria. Curiously, his take off point was not the roadmap but a poser fired at 'Fixing Nigeria', the thematic focus circumscribing The Kukah Centre's intervention. Is it Nigeria that is in need of fixing or Nigerians? This was to manifest in his thought process throughout his presentation. It was what unfolded when he expressed the puzzles as to whether anyone could justify vandalism of public assets such as pipelines. His argument is that it is a cultural attribute we must transcend in Nigeria because anger could not be a license for damaging assets that serve everyone.

Many people replied him in the course of the session but the humorous angling in Kukah's comments on the issue provides the more philosophical take. Kukah said he learnt while he was involved in managing the Niger

Delta crisis how pipeline vandalism could be linked to a deconstruction of an Abuja language, the language of power. Or the tendency of the government to respond to virtually every demand by saying the plan was already in the pipeline. It got to a point where it became logical to open up the pipeline if everything good that could come is already in the pipeline. The serious side of the humour is: it is not so much about how outrageous but how pipeline vandalism measures cumulative impact of alienation, how ordinary people have become so cynical about the government and the elite as to normalise the most outrageous of collective behaviour.

Whether Fashola accepted this deconstruction of the practice of pipeline vandalism is a different matter but the reality of irregular actors and their disruptive forces is a key point which has equally been made by global oracles on energy security in the era such as Daniel Yergin, the American historian. This is also what Fashola himself recognised when he said at CDD's Buharimeter Town Hall meeting the previous week that the post Cold War had complexified warfare.

In what might have been the most elaborate elucidation of the roadmap so far, Fashola started with an admission that 5074 megawatts, the highest capability attained in the history of Nigeria on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, is grossly inadequate for a population of over 150million. The first response to that



is to increase it by diversifying energy sources beyond gas dependent electricity generating strategy to biomass, hydro, solar and coal; ensure completion of transmission projects, including the independent power plants scattered all over the place. Doing all these would, by his calculation, land the country at the phase of steady power supply. By that, he meant the stage at which everyone gets the energy s/he requires in tandem with global per capital consumption standards. It was at this point that the first flash of the technocratic vision circumscribing the roadmap manifested when he linked this phase of the roadmap to what he called “a real census” of Nigerians as a basis for planning. Interestingly though, his hook up to the authority of 'facts and figures' typical of the technocrat is not simply as a requirement for this phase but also as a way of linking excess capacity over needs so that the system can absorb unforeseen shortfall. All of that would lead to the third phase which is anchored more on the energy consumption attitude of the citizens that would check wastefulness.

Nothing will ever be enough unless wastefulness in energy consumption forms a strong part of the consciousness, he said, adding that government has commenced a conscientisation exercise on this, beginning with the building code that would check putting ten bulbs where five would just be okay.

He then moved to roads where the problems

identified stretch from lack of maintenance, abuse of the facility by excessive tonnage of cargo about which some road users do not care and the over-legislation of procurement regime, among others. In relation to housing, a national housing design programme is in the pipeline, he announced. It is not the same thing as the federal government providing houses for everyone. What the government is doing with the national housing design is not single handedly delivering all housing needs but catalysing a business model for housing towards achieving standardisation and uniformity that could guarantee economies of scale. Still in his language, once the government has resolved the cultural issues about a national housing design and prove a concept, then housing could become a key driver for growth because all the players in the industry, especially investors, (emphasis his) could then come in.

He is not sure any of the figures bandied about in relation to the housing deficit in Nigeria depict the truth of the matter. Some people swear it is 30 millions, others say it is 20 and yet some stand at 17 million. All he knows is that shelter is a fundamental right, a position he is not sure applies to housing. In other words, is housing a fundamental right? “Not everyone will own a house but that doesn't mean everyone cannot rent a place”, he said. Nigeria or Nigerians, he said, could decide that government provides everyone with housing but, in that case, they must consider that government would have the

right to decide how many children a family could have as well take ownership of all land. That sounded like an anticipatory warning to all welfarists, soft capitalists and those with 'Socialist' temptations that there are hard choices to be made should the government be compelled to shift position on the housing aspect of the infrastructure roadmap.

It is either that the Minister has convinced the government or the government has convinced the Minister that even in a situation where about 22 million houses are needed, the Federal Housing Authority, (FHA) cannot take the lead as an investor, compete with other contenders and make profit even when allowing the government to fulfil its affirmative obligations. It must be strictly private sector actors, provided elbow rooms by the government, that must lead the process of making it happen. In other words, it must be the market.

It was then the conversation began. Olumuyiwa Ajibola, a former President of the Nigerian Society of Engineers and one of the five interlocutors lighted the way. He was in complete agreement with Fashola's concerns over the tonnage issue and what he called the procurement problem that he also regarded as rent-taking and destructive. However, he wanted to know if the Minister has been briefed about the idea of a highway authority and road fund he said is the global best practice for road management and already the practice across sub-Saharan Africa. The authority, he told everyone,

would function very similar to what the ports authority is to the inland waterways or the airports authority to aviation. The proposal is already in the House of Representatives in the form of a bill. It turned out that the Minister is aware of the idea although he politely disagreed that it would, in itself, solve much because “it would only be an institution”.

Mrs Joy Nwaoko, also of the Nigerian Society of Engineers raised a number of technical issues over which further discussion between her and the Minister became an imperative. Again Bishop Kukah turned her contribution into a joke when he said that, for the first time, the word redundancy did not point at a negative vocabulary about labour but something positive in the grammar of electricity supply engineering. Emmanuel Mbaka of Platinum Mortgage spoke of the extra burden of paying for 'economic trees' in the acquisition of land even after a governor might have signed the Certificate of Occupancy. In his words, “C of O is one but compensation for crops and trees is the beginning of the crisis”. While accepting that it is an issue, Fashola disagrees that payment for economic trees is a big issue. After all, the FHA has land in all the states. For Patrick Okigbo, the issues are the N100b debt being owed by certain military and paramilitary institutions; the plausibility of local communities securing the pipelines to counter the unavailability of gas due to vandalism; the absence of governing boards for many institutions in the power

sector; the possibility of accommodating more actors outside of DISCOS with particular reference to emergency augmentation of power supply and what the business model in housing provision is.

While not discounting the argument for completeness, Fashola believes that even without the boards, the institutions are functioning. The licences to DISCOS, he said, were no absolute documents permitting closures and trends are emerging that open up how other actors could be involved. It was his reply on the plausibility of local communities securing the pipelines that brought the debate on pipeline vandalism already referred to in this piece. So also is the case with the housing business model question.

From the floor came a number of questions, comments and suggestions. Someone felt the roads from the southern part of the country to Abuja are extraordinarily bad and ought to receive better and more urgent consideration. Fashola told him the most strategic criterion at play is “roads that drive the economy most” at a time of less earning but more demands. A case was made for a special consideration which would guarantee electricity supply to the universities as centres of diverse intellectual activities. The Minister accepted this categorisation, said a plan is already in the pipeline within the rural electrification folder of the regime but the universities, he said, must also accept that they have a challenge

in the matter of darkness over Nigeria. What are the departments of electrical engineering doing, he queried. Yes, wastefulness is part of the electricity crisis in Nigeria because, according to the Minister, “at some point, our outages was partly the result of wastages”. He was responding to a lady journalist who wanted to be sure that the Minister meant that wastefulness is an explanation for the crisis.

What is government still doing in electricity supply after privatisation of electricity/energy?, a retired General asked. The answer he got is that government retains regulatory control. That, he claimed, is what the countries in BRICS have done – retain one leg and, in Nigeria, it is the transmission leg government has retained for itself while letting go production and distribution. Beyond that, there are critical issues of settlement of commitments, management of core assets, staff matters, property belonging to extant bureaucracies. Thirdly, government would still be keen on policy matters such as what sort of energy system is safe or unsafe, etc. On how come we have an all gas dependent electrification system, the conversation was that we fell for the attractions of gas: its scale, scope, relative cleanliness, the speed of gas plants and even the quantum when compared to hydro, solar.

While Fashola was on this comparative energy system analysis, my mind wandered to Atiku Abubakar, former Vice-President's

story of how he approached Obasanjo, his boss in 1999, to propose a diversification from gas to other energy systems. According to him, he was rebuffed. Telling the story at the launching of Chido Onuma's *We Are All Biafrans* on May 31<sup>st</sup> at The Yar'Adua Centre, Abuja, Atiku said the government then went on spending on electrification of Nigeria through gas energy but which failed to provide electricity. And then he added, perhaps with some mischievous intent" when they were calling them to account, they didn't call me". While the story bears the stamp of the Obasanjo – Atiku feud and indicates how far away the two are from each other in terms of reconciliation, it confers support on the thesis of a long disputation over gas dependent electrification system within government. In this context, the question might be what the disputation could be in the Buhari regime on the issue. Is everyone there in agreement that an infrastructure strategy based on the market in an unusually depressed economy will fly?

## GOING FORWARD: SOME TIPS

### **1: To the Federal Government of Nigeria:**

That over 50 years, Nigeria has only been able to generate less than six thousand megawatts of power is both a national embarrassment and the true measure of the visionless of successive administrations. The APC Government, the platform under which President Buhari has come to power must understand that success in generating power will be at the heart of changing almost every facet of our national lives. It is the most strategic policy ace that the government has to play.

### **2: To the Ministry of Power, Works and Housing:**

The Honourable Minister for Power has both the depth and patriotic instinct to drive this process. However, it must calibrate its message in a way that convinces an already exhausted and cynical population that it has the capacity to earn our trust in the delivery of Power, Housing and Infrastructure. Therefore, it must remain relentless in its engagement and appeal to the citizens. The Ministry must engage citizens with a clear message of its three phased projected plan for power in Nigeria with clear time lines.



### **3: To Nigerians and Host Communities.**

We appreciate the fact that our people have been lied to by fraudsters in government. However, we must seek to turn a new leaf and rededicate ourselves to helping to solve the problems of our country. We will be the first beneficiaries of these policies. As such, host communities especially must engage with the government agencies positively while staking their claim for some level of participation in the affairs of government.

### **4: To All Nigerians at all levels of Life:**

Let us overcome the culture of cynicism and turn our frustration into hope. For the sake of the future generation, let us each make the sacrifices, rise beyond politics, focus on our country and our people and support the efforts to light up Nigeria.

