

# HOW REFORMS SUCCEED OR FAIL

Patrick O. Okigbo III, in conversation with **Prof. Patrick Utomi**

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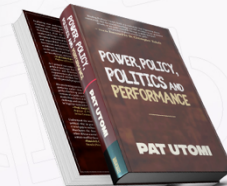
# HOW REFORMS SUCCEED OR FAIL

**Wed. Feb. 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2024 3:00<sup>PM</sup> – 4:30<sup>PM</sup> (WAT)**
**zoom**
**bit.ly/DevDiscourse\_Reform\_UTOMI**


**Patrick O. Okigbo III**  
Founding Partner,  
Nextier  
Host



**Prof. Pat Utomi**  
Founder/CEO, Centre for  
Values in Leadership  
Speaker



**Dr. Modupe  
(Mo) Adefeso  
-Olateju**  
Founder,  
The Education  
Partnership. Fellow,  
The Brookings  
Institution

**EDUCATION  
REFORMS:  
Private Schools  
for the Poor**  
**Feb. 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2024  
3:00 – 4:30 (WAT)**



**Jude Chike  
Uzonwanne**  
Author, The First  
Trillion, Board,  
MyMD  
Pharmaceuticals  
USA

**Upcoming Sessions**

**THE TRILLION  
DOLLAR ECONOMY**  
**Arbitrage and the  
Nigerian Dream**  
**Mar. 06<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
3:00 – 4:30 (WAT)**

## HOW REFORMS SUCCEED OR FAIL

One of the reasons why Africa struggles to achieve sustained development is its inability to implement reforms effectively. Several scholars have proposed different explanations for this issue. For example, [Daron Acemoglu](#) and [James Robinson](#) attribute the challenge to the nature of [institutions](#), while [William Easterly](#) focuses on the difficulties with day-to-day public policy management. [Guillermo O'Donnell](#) highlights the power calculus in the public policy process. However, there is limited research on the relationship between the political elite and senior bureaucrats in policymaking and how it affects reforms and state performance.

Prof. [Pat Utomi](#)'s new book, "Power, Policy, Politics, and Performance," aims to fill a gap in scholarship. The book explores how the changing political culture in Nigeria's various governance periods has affected performance. Pat's framework explains the relationship between high-level career public servants and politically elected or appointed officials in formulating public policy. The book critically analyses the circumstances under which national bureaucracies can influence the structure and content of policymaking at the national level.

[Patrick O. Okigbo III](#), the Founding Partner at [Nextier](#), used this [Development Discourse](#) session with Prof. Utomi to explore how reforms succeed or fail. This document provides an annotated transcript of the discussion. Click [here](#) to watch the discourse.

## ANNOTATED TRANSCRIPT

### HOW REFORMS SUCCEED OR FAIL

Professor Patrick Utomi, in conversation with Patrick O. Okigbo III  
February 07, 2023

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFM5Lc31GsU>

**Patrick O. Okigbo III:** Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Development Discourse, where we ideate for Africa's development. My name is Patrick Okigbo III, Nextier's founding partner. Nextier is a multi-competency advisory firm focused on solving complex development challenges in the continent.

My guest today is one of those Nigerians recognised by their first name or initials. Professor Pat Utomi, or simply Pat to many Nigerians, is a political economy professor and management expert steeped in both theory and practice. He has about ten books on the subject. Over the last four decades, he has engaged in various initiatives to fix Nigeria, from founding civil society organisations like Concerned Professionals and [Center for Values in Leadership](#) to co-founding [Lagos Business School](#) to running for president of Nigeria. Pat sits on the boards of several Nigerian and international companies. Is any Nigerian more connected than Pat in the business and public policy cycles? So, there is no one more qualified to discuss our topic for today, which is how reforms succeed or fail. Pat, welcome.

**Prof. Patrick Utomi:** Thank you very much, Patrick.

**Okigbo:** Congratulations on your sixty-eighth birthday celebrations, which you marked with a full-day policy discourse at the MUSON Center yesterday in Lagos and a public presentation of your latest book, *Power, Policy, Politics and Performance*. The book examines the interactions between senior bureaucrats and politicians to deliver reforms and performance. Perhaps we can start with you presenting the book's core thesis, and then we can frame our conversations around it.

**Utomi:** Thank you very much. The imperative for writing this book came from my frustrations with Africa's slow economic growth. For many years, I followed the big debate on the reason for Africa's sluggish growth. I recall attending the Aspen Institute summit in 1996, organised by the French Prime Minister at the time, Raymond Barre, a professor of economics. He opened the meeting on the theme that *Africa must produce or die*. We had exciting conversations at that meeting. Blaise Compaoré, the then-president of Burkina Faso, sat next to me. I think to my left was the then deputy managing director of the IMF, Alassane Ouattara, who is now the president of Cote d'Ivoire. There was also a fascinating gentleman from Uganda, a former foreign minister, Olara Otunnu, who had a brilliant mind. At the time, South Africa was emerging, and Europe was getting very excited about what the country would do to stimulate things in Africa. This era was called the season of Afro-pessimism when the world had begun to forget about Africa. The world thought Africa might drop off the cliff and stop being a part of the planet. The situation on the continent was dire, characterised by a succession of conflicts, resource-driven wars, and coups.

The literature explaining why Africa did not produce had several contending perspectives. However, there were two primary viewpoints: the so-called geography (or destiny) argument, on the one hand, and the policy argument, on the other. Several academics dominated the destiny argument, with Jeffrey Sachs as the leading advocate. I used to shock my MBA students with Jeffrey Sachs's theory that Africa is poor because it was destined to be poor. And they would go, "What!" I tell them that Jeffrey Sachs does not hate Africa. In fact, he seems to be inclined to love Africa. The problem is that he is trying to provide an alibi to African leaders. Jeff would argue, for example, that Africa is not growing because geography placed the continent in the tropics with its mosquito infestation. He argued that Africa's productivity was low because the people were often sick from malaria. My friend, Paul Collier, who seemed to lead the policy arguments, would say, hogwash. He argued that Jeff was talking nonsense.

I tended to agree with Paul. It's certainly much more than geography. The South East Asian economies are in the tropics. Singapore and Lagos were similar. Same as Kuala Lumpur. So why were these economies growing while Africa was not?

Furthermore, I used to travel through Israel. Israel is in the desert, but exports cut flowers, pumpkins, and other stuff every night into Europe. We can't blame geography for Africa's challenges. So, I tended to side with Paul Collier in that general conversation of why growth is slow in Africa. The most astonishing thesis is that African leaders had not led in terms of their policy choices.

It's certainly much more than geography. The South East Asian economies are in the tropics ... why were these economies growing while Africa was not?

During that debate, I wrote the book, "*Why Nations Are Poor*."<sup>1</sup> The book attempted to identify some interdependent variables that work together to lead to economic growth or lack thereof. Among those variables were policy choices, which aligns with Paul's point that

African leaders are making the wrong policy choices. And, of course, in terms of thinking about policy choices, it was generally in a simplistic way between the so-called dirigiste thesis of government control and markets.

The next variable is institutions, which have emerged as a consensus basis for human progress. I watched this begin to emerge. Today, historians like Niall Ferguson write about how institutions separated the West from the rest, for instance, in [Civilisation, the West and the Rest or The Six Killer Apps of Western Power](#).

Another variable is human capital. A very critical part of human capital is education and healthcare. If people have the right education and are not dying, they can create value. Today, we talk about the aristocracy of talent. A part of what separates the West from the rest is the point that Adrian Woodridge, the British journalist and writer, makes in that lovely book about the [Aristocracy of Talent and How It Shaped the Modern World](#). So, when you live in Africa, where talent is put down, seriously put down by the shenanigans of leaders, you can infer that Africa will struggle. People's quality of life will not improve, and they will not create wealth. This has become famous in Nigeria lately, with Peter Obi talking about consumption to

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<sup>1</sup> Utomi, P., 2006. Why Nations are poor, a Framework for Explanation. *Memograph Pan African University*, Lekki-Epe, Lagos.

production, even though I like to preface this every time by saying that consumption is not necessarily bad. So, let's be careful before people think something is wrong with consumption. Some kinds of consumption may be problematic, and you must produce to consume. When you produce, then consumption can stimulate production.

**Okigbo:** In fact, countries should seek ways to stimulate consumption.

**Utomi:** Absolutely. Then, there is the almighty variable called culture. Values shape human progress. My introduction to this concept of values and human progress is to go to a man I was enormously a fan of. When I was a grad student in the US, I would abandon a class to watch proceedings in the US Senate, waiting for him to talk. A former Harvard professor that has your name.

**Okigbo:** Yes, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

**Utomi:** Moynihan made a profound statement many years ago. He was asked a very simple question. What is the difference between Democrats and Republicans? He answered that Democrats are liberals while Republicans are conservatives. Many people from outside ask, what's the difference? Americans are all the same. He explained that there are some governing truths of these liberals and conservatives.

According to Moynihan, the central conservative truth is that it is not politics but culture that is responsible for the progress of a society. He explained that this is why Republicans focus on family values and work ethics. In addition, the central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself. That was what his life was about. When I think of Moynihan, the day I heard him talk about problems of urban America, using the iatrogenic<sup>2</sup> medical references when a doctor does more harm to the patient when the patient dies more from the doctor's treatment than from the ailment he was trying to treat. He discussed urban policy in America as an iatrogenic choice process.

Moynihan's statement became the basis of a colloquium at Harvard while I was there writing the book [Managing Uncertainty](#). That colloquium was on how values shape human progress

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and was captured in a book edited by Lawrence D. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington Jr. titled [Culture Matters](#). There were many fantastic presentations at that colloquium. However, one of my favourites was by Michael Porter, a Harvard Business School professor and Managing Partner at the Monitor Group. He used Colombia to demonstrate why culture matters.

Colombia produces leather goods, but they couldn't achieve economic growth. So, the research team went to America to investigate why people were not buying the bags and shoes from Columbia. They found that people perceived Colombian leather goods as poor-quality products. When the researchers interviewed the manufacturers, they attributed the quality of their products to the poor quality of the animal hides and skins. The researchers then questioned the ranchers about the reason for the poor-quality hides and skins, to which they

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<sup>2</sup> [Iatrogenic] adj. describing a condition or disease resulting from treatment and/or the actions of healthcare professionals, for example an unforeseen or inevitable side-effect, hospital-acquired infection, or post-operative complication.

replied that the cows were stupid. The cows go to the barbed wire to scratch their body. So, the conclusion was that Colombia is poor because the cows are stupid.

So, you see, this is where culture comes in. Values shape human progress. Nigerian politicians are the reason Nigeria is poor. But they don't realise it. They don't realise the wickedness. They do a lot of foolish things. I mean, look at a country in a terrible existential crisis. People are struggling to live. Politicians are not intelligent enough to realise that it's time to stop exhibiting reckless consumption. For instance, during the Reagan era, one of the executives flew a helicopter to the golf club, and there was public outrage. However, Nigerian politicians don't think that way. They believe it is their business to personalise the public treasury. So, culture matters.

Who sets the tone of culture? Leaders. That's why leadership is important. If you don't have character, how can you set the tone of a progressive culture that will lead people to progress? I like to illustrate this point with the motto of a government secondary school: When wealth is lost, nothing is lost. When health is lost, something is lost. When character is lost, all is lost.<sup>3</sup> I have used this motto to teach my MBA classes. In class, I play a video of this former billionaire coming out of the subway in New York who saw a homeless guy begging for money and remarked, my goodness, this guy is worth much more than me. At the very worst, he's worth

I tell people that at the centre of the endless debate about Nigeria's development is that Nigeria has lost character.

zero. I am worth far less than zero. A couple of years later, that man became a billionaire again. Indeed, he ended up as the president of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump. Another example is Steve Jobs, who lost his health in the prime of his life. He had enough money but couldn't buy health. Something is lost when health is lost. However, when character is lost, all is gone. I tell people that at the centre of the endless debate about

Nigeria's development is that Nigeria has lost character. The world does not want to deal with you when you lose character. We are not going anywhere until Nigerian politicians understand this point.

Leaders set the tone of culture, and these variables determine whether a nation is rich or poor. And if you want to make comparisons, my friend Peter Lewis did it yesterday,<sup>4</sup> between India's trajectory since 1999 and Nigeria's trajectory. The same Professor Peter Lewis wrote a book many years ago titled [Growing Apart: Oil, Politics, and Economic Change in Indonesia and Nigeria](#), in which he compared both countries. In the early 1960s, pundits said to Indonesia, we wish you would be more like Nigeria. But in the 1990s, they said to Nigeria, we wish you could be like Indonesia.

When you find yourself falling behind others, you must review what the problem is. Sometimes, it is forced on you from outside because of the nature of the international trading system. This point is central to Joseph Stiglitz's argument in [Globalisation and its Discontents](#). You can export inflation from your country to other trading partners, hence the existence of the International Monetary Fund. The Bretton Woods institutions were created at the end of

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<sup>3</sup> The quote is attributed to the televangelist, Billy Graham.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. Peter Lewis, the Warren Weinstein Chair of African Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, presented a paper at Prof. Utomi's birthday celebrations and book launch on the day before this Development Discourse session.

World War II to deal with one of the causes of war. If you look at the history of war, among the things that led to big wars, the first is misbehaviour in economic relations. Globalised trade led to increasing wealth, and as people enjoyed their wealth and got bigger, they created dynamic policies to protect the economy from these people from outside. These invariably reduce trade, increase poverty and irritation, and turn any slight provocation into war. So, to avoid this, it was essential to ensure that there was some policing to help people manage their economies. That is why the IMF was created. The major criticism in the book *Globalization and its Discontents* is that the IMF forgot its role and became the policeman banker for Western banks, which made the wrong policy and lending choices.

The pressure to reform either comes from those kinds of institutions, for instance, via IMF conditionalities or from your realisation that you need to improve the way things are because if many people are hungry, one day they will cut your neck off. So, the causal effect leads you to want to change things and initiate reforms. The question is, why have those reforms failed? Many have failed, including the grand reforms from the IMF called the Structural Adjustment Program. Why did they fail? Why did they not achieve what was proposed? There are a variety of excuses and quasi-reasons. These have not been adequately interrogated. One of the biggest reasons reforms have failed is because the most critical player in the reform process is avoided.

My dear sister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, was so frustrated that she wrote a book about it. The book [Reforming the Unreformable](#) tells the whole story. Is Nigeria unreformable? Perhaps not.

One of the things you find is that the Nigerian state has stopped being a developmental state.

The problem was how the reform was introduced. First, the people they were trying to reform were resentful of these foreign do-gooders. They saw them as people enjoying life at the World Bank, travelling around the world, and then jumping into Nigeria one day to teach Nigerians how to behave. That is the starting point of resistance. There is serious competition between the bureaucrats and the political elite, which constitutes one reason reforms fail.

Let me use Nigerian history to provide one illustration of the reform process. I generally like to begin with this point because it fascinated me when I first came across it. Also, I had the privilege of knowing the principal actors involved. In 1957, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the Premier of the Eastern Region. He was very much impassioned about education. He wanted the Eastern region to leapfrog in education relative to Southwest Nigeria, where universal basic primary education was already free. So, he decided to introduce Universal Basic Education into the Eastern region. At the time, Jerome Udoji had just become the permanent secretary of the finance ministry. The finance team reviewed revenue and told the premier that the idea was impossible because the region couldn't afford it. However, they suggested charging school fees for primary one and five pupils. The logic was that the school fees paid by primary one pupils would help reduce their onboarding costs. Then, by primary five, they would pay another small fee as they prepared to graduate. This proposal led to conflicts between the politicians and the bureaucrats. Udoji offered to resign and took off to the University of Cambridge. Before Udoji got to London, the conglomerate, John Holt, had a letter of appointment for him to become their executive director. Udoji wanted to leave the civil service, but many people in the southeastern region convinced him that the move would not benefit the people. However, Zik suddenly found a way to apologise without losing face, and Udoji returned to Enugu.

So, what then happened? The Eastern region looked for a creative way to advance education without necessarily blowing the budget. The government found ways to share the burden of making education happen. That was how the Igbo State Union became perhaps one of the most prominent educating bodies in the country. The Union set up secondary schools across the country, not just in the eastern region. The combined efforts of the community and the Igbo State Union rocketed up education in the east region. The goals were achieved from a different pathway. And that is why creativity in policymaking remains so important. But for that to happen, you must understand the nexus between the public bureaucracy and the political class. Because time is going by quickly, let me advance to the central theorising around this.

**Okigbo:** Around the book

**Utomi:** In Latin America, an Argentine scholar called Guillermo O'Donnell, looking at modernisation back in the sixties and seventies, concluded that what was going on was that the political and bureaucratic elites – using Brazil as a classic example – were creating an exclusive coalition focused on modernisation. They didn't want politicians to be involved. They considered themselves developmentally minded technocrats, tough soldiers, keen on modernisation. Guillermo called that process bureaucratic authoritarianism.<sup>5</sup> He sought to examine these processes in other countries. A key question was how to enable that coalition to become a developmental coalition. One of the things you find in Nigeria is that the Nigerian state has stopped being a developmental state.

Development of the Nigerian people dropped off the table in the 1999 negotiations between the military and the politicians.

Peter Lewis, in his book, which will be published soon, seems to touch on this point. The Nigerian political class, in 1999, agreed to find a way to keep the military out and share the booty or the rents available in the country. And somehow, in that trade, in those transactions, the development of the Nigerian people dropped off the table. So, it became the government of politicians for politicians by politicians. And that is why Nigeria has not been developing. I know you have been trying to get me to stop. So, let me stop there.

**Okigbo:** The book's core thesis is finding a way for the bureaucratic and political elites to work together towards development, right?

**Utomi:** That is the central thesis, but you must understand that point and the process for achieving it.

**Okigbo:** Your book discussed Nigeria's governance epochs: the colonial, the constitutional and what we have now, the democratic. Nigeria is a society where the elites have conspired to take care of themselves and forgotten about development. They control all the institutions and levers of government. It is difficult to push them aside. Furthermore, the people are so poor that they can't do anything about their situation. What needs to happen for the elite to fracture or split? How can the people get the elite to begin to work for them?

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<sup>5</sup> O'Donnell, G., 2023. *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina 1966-1973 in Comparative Perspective*. Univ of California Press.



**Utomi:** Well, that control is only for a season, and that is why the concept of legitimacy is so critical in my conversation. When the elites hijack the institutions to retain power, they lose legitimacy. And what is legitimacy? I want to separate legality from legitimacy. They talk a lot of nonsense about Supreme Court judges. That is legality. What matters is legitimacy. Do the people accept that you have the right to lead them?

One of the best discussions of legitimacy comes from Seymour Martin Lipset, the American political sociologist in [The First New Nation](#). According to him, legitimacy is earned every day. This is why Western politicians constantly look at the polls and track themselves. Legitimacy is earned daily.

Nigerian politicians don't think about legitimacy. They play games of legality. That's why a person who came fourth in an election will try to govern. When you don't have legitimacy, you really can't govern. Even in military rule, they had to earn legitimacy to be effective and powerful, even with their guns. They still couldn't govern unless they found some way to earn legitimacy. So, if your legitimacy continues to depreciate, you will be like Somalia one day.

They talk a lot of nonsense about Supreme Court judges. That's about legality. What matters is legitimacy.

**Okigbo:** I feel that the people get to a point where they really cannot do much. Take Nigeria, for instance. We are a poor nation. We are a day-pay nation. Ninety per cent of us must go out daily to feed, so we can't sustain a public demonstration for more than a few days. We've got to go back to where we earn our living. In that case, is it the masses who will fix the country, or is it the middle class? Nigeria does not have a middle class, either. So, isn't it at the elite level that something must happen? Is it not our hope that an elite faction will break away and seek legitimacy by driving development?

**Utomi:** Absolutely. Think of the so-called tiger economies of Asia. Some elements within the elite realised that the status quo would result in their undoing in the long run. Take Malaysia and Singapore, for example. This ambitious young Singaporean, Lee Kuan Yew, back in those days, felt his country could not survive unless it went into a coalition with their bigger neighbour to the north, the Malay dominant nation, Malaysia. So, they created a federation. But the Malay politicians were worried about this too clever, ambitious boy from Singapore. Like their Nigerian counterparts, the Malay politicians do not like people who can think. So, they ejected Singapore from the federation in 1965. Politics in Nigeria is bankrupt. Their primary mission is to prevent people who think from being in the political process because their thinking gets in the way of the mess they want to make.

Lee broke down and wept because he thought the expulsion was the end for his young nation. Then he put on a thinking cap, and before you knew it, Singapore was surging. Malaysia looks around the corner and asks what's going on here. Meanwhile, Mahathir Mohammed, who was giving them trouble in the cabinet, told the prime minister that everything was give-and-take. Sadly, the Malay politicians were not giving. All they did was take. In response, the Malay politicians expelled Mahathir from the party and removed him as a junior minister. Mahathir then wrote a book titled [The Malay Dilemma](#), which led to riots and all kinds of stuff. Subsequently, Abdul Razak resigned as prime minister, and Mahathir returned to the party, the United Malays National Organization. Mahathir eventually ended up as prime minister. For his

survival, Mahathir looked across the border and led Malaysia to begin a process, and we know where it led Malaysia.

So, I think that a section of an elite, either out of a certain sense of self or whatever it is that compels it, chooses to commit class suicide within the rent culture. That section of the elite is the one that forces out these characters whose aim is about how much rent they are extracting from the system. These characters eventually find they wouldn't do better in this new order because the cake must be baked.

**Okigbo:** So, what is the process for sequencing development in Nigeria? How do you trigger that split that leads to a section of the elite focusing more on development and driving reforms that can lead to performance?

**Utomi:** I am not sure that there is a formula. If there were a formula, everybody would have looked for it, bought it, and propelled it. But history is very amazing. The moments just happened. Unfortunately, you can miss the opportunity and be lost, or you may be able to pick up on it. However, one of my favourite examples of how the unexpected happens goes back to World War II. Germans were occupying France, and Allied forces had landed in Normandy, setting the stage for their push into Europe. Dietrich Von Choltitz was the German General in Paris. Knowing he was about to lose the war, Hitler ordered Von Choltitz to burn down Paris. Von Choltitz put on his uniform, stepped in front of a mirror and asked himself why history should remember me as the man who destroyed the most beautiful city in the world.

**Okigbo:** Exactly

**Utomi:** Von Choltitz told the Allied Forces he wouldn't defend Paris. He asked them to come in and take it. Eisenhower thought it was a trap, so he ignored the intelligence. Hitler called Von Choltitz when he heard that Paris was not burning. Von Choltitz sent the message again, but the Allied Forces refused to fall into what they thought was a trap. A French man, Charles de Gaulle, heard what was happening and saw an opportunity. At the head of his rag-tag French army, he drove into Paris without reinforcement and took it for nothing. Self-interest, egos, and other things drive the rascals that occupy the space today. One of them will not want to be remembered as the person who kept Nigerians and their children and grandchildren in perennial poverty, and then something happens.

That is an oxymoron. A good policy considers implementability. If you cannot implement it, it is not a good policy.

**Okigbo:** Fantastic. While waiting for that to happen, we still must find ways to keep working on problems and chasing performance. There are often repeated maxims, so to speak, that Nigeria's problem is not good ideas but implementation. I have always struggled with that, but increasingly, I hear that in even knowledgeable companies. What do you think of that?

**Utomi:** You know, the way it used to be put is that we have good policies, but the problem is bad implementation. That is an oxymoron. A good policy considers implementability. If you cannot implement it, it is not a good policy.

**Okigbo:** Exactly. Thank you

**Utomi:** Back when I was in grad school in the seventies, Jeff Pressman wrote a book titled [Implementation](#). He explains that implementation is about changing your attitude toward how you do things. And I am glad my friend, Osita Ogbu, has just written a book about [Development as Attitude](#). For instance, if you tell people that to get from Victoria Island to Surulere very fast, we need asphalt roads, but somebody tells them that the gods of Lagos have something against black things, that if they walk on that black thing, that something will happen, they won't use the road. So, you have tarred the road, but people don't use the road. Instead, they try to get to Surulere via the bush. What, then, is the point of tarring the road? So, development and managing change is about changing attitudes. You cannot change attitude unless the people and the policymakers embrace each other and realise they have a common destiny. And that the essence of this policy is to improve everybody's lot.

The idea of the common good of all is not religion; rather, it is common sense. Therefore, policy implementation begins with creating shared values among the citizens about what path to take for human progress. That is the most crucial role that politicians play in society: Convincing others that this is how we can all have a better future together. When they begin to do that, and people begin to embrace that, you will find that you can more effectively implement that policy. However, telling me there is a good policy and a bad implementation is nonsense.

**Okigbo:** Thank you for that. We will get into the conversation on how to make reforms succeed. But one question before we get there is how much do you attribute our failures in the country to the fact that we haven't rigorously debated our development philosophy? An example here

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is the last eight years. I am not sure what system we practised. I am unsure if we practised a liberal capitalist system, a socialist Marxist system, or a mix. And that leads to a lot of confusion. Take, for instance, the power sector: Is power a commodity that must be paid for, or is it a social good that must be given to people? So, to what extent is this lack of rigour in a debate on our development philosophy part of why we cannot implement reforms?

**Utomi:** Well, it is a very important part of our failure. In Nigeria, we don't have rational public conversations. Until we can have rational public conversations with logic and facts, we can't develop. John Louis-Ekra, former president of Afreximbank, and I were having dinner some years ago when he said that the most frustrating thing about Africa is the African elite who make bombastic comments about things they have no information about. For instance, oh, look at that man. He stole everything in that company. According to Jürgen Habermas, the essence of democracy is rational public conversation and not bombastic, meaningless innuendos that have no substance. We don't have rational public conversations in Nigeria, and that's tough to build on.

**Okigbo:** If you could crystallise for us, what are some key success factors to ensure we can drive reforms in Nigeria? I know that there is no one rule playbook for it, but are there some critical success factors, especially in the context of Nigeria's political economy, that we should seek to put in place in designing and implementing reforms?

**Utomi:** Yes, first, you need some committed stakeholders. One of my pains with the Nigerian Economic Summit Group process is that it should have been stronger. In 1985, there was a conference in Nairobi that the Aga Khan Foundation sponsored. It dealt with the idea of a tripartite approach to development. Senior Nigerians from the public, private, and NGO sectors attended that conference. Chief Ernest Shonekan, then chief executive of UAC, one of the biggest companies in the country at the time, participated in the conference. Alhaji Abubakar Alhaji (triple A), the federal permanent secretary in finance, led the public sector delegation. Dr Jack came from the Private Development Agency. This conference discussed how a balanced view of development could emerge from the partnership between these three sectors.

After the conference, the attendees called a meeting that brought in some more people and founded what we then called the Enabling Environment Forum. The person who managed that process was a remarkable gentleman named Udo Uwakaneme. Udo is still alive. I believe he lives now in his hometown, Arochuku. This Enabling Environment Forum got private and public sector people to begin a dialogue on improving Nigeria's policy development process to serve everybody better. Then, the group's chair, Chief Ernest Shonekan, accidentally became Nigeria's head of government. He called for a Nigerian Economic Summit using the framework of the Enabling Environment Forum, which then became the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG).

I regret that we allowed the public sector to take the driver's seat with the NESG. By slipping into a less active role, the NESG lost it. The private sector should have continued to drive the Summit and advise the government on what it should do for our country to make progress, and the NGO sector on how they can hold the government accountable. As partners, we may have built a great country.

**Okigbo:** So, what are the factors? Lately, I have been thinking that part of the problem is that we tend to like the grandiose. We tend to like the big announcements, but we haven't delivered on any of these big announcements. Shouldn't that be a red flag? Shouldn't we focus on bite-sized things we can drive and build muscle memory on delivering on anything before we begin to take on these big things? So, if a government starts to announce big things, maybe it's a sign that the idea won't work. Perhaps it's a sign for all of us to start shouting at them to narrow the scope. What do you think of this idea?

I regret that we allowed the public sector to take the driver's seat with the NESG.

**Utomi:** Patrick, I think there are many ways to skin a cat. It is not that I want to, but there are many ways to skin a cat. Nothing prevents us from doing what in the NESG was called low-hanging fruits and working on those and all of that, but audacity is also the essence of life. Some audacious plunges can galvanise everybody and move society in a particular direction. This is what happened in Dubai or the UAE. It was daring, which provided momentum for what Dubai has become.

**Okigbo:** Everywhere I have presented this argument, there have been good points on both sides. And there are pros and cons, as with most things. I've got a question from a Bashorun Balogun, and he says, "Thank you, Prof., for clarifying what a good policy means. What would

*you say is the problem with the policy process? Is it the lack of a human-centred approach or lack of basic knowledge of public policy?"*

**Utomi:** First, I think this is important. I don't know how we missed that. You were going towards ideology when you talked about the last eight years and all of that. First, it is because of the failure of the political party system in Nigeria. A political party begins with a set of ideas from which ideation around problem-solving can flow. People like to use the word ideology. Ideology, you know, makes some people nervous. If you go back to Charles Lindblom's remarkable book, [\*Politics and Markets\*](#), about the world's socio-economic, political systems and ideology. This noteworthy book, which he wrote in the seventies, explores how to organise to solve society's problems.

I don't think a political party has meaning if it doesn't have a frame of understanding for how to solve problems. Political parties are about competing in alternative frames of how you solve problems. Some people might have what you may call a Welfarist Fabian Socialism approach. And again, if you want to go back to British politics and how the Fabians, a group of intellectuals, arose in England and aimed to change England. To achieve this, they decided they were going to do two things. First, create an institution that would be a generator of those ideas. So, they founded the London School of Economics. Second, they created a political party that would drive those ideas. So, they founded the Labour Party. So many people don't know the link between LSE and the Labour Party and the dominance of the thoughts of someone like Harold Laski in that area. However, it is linked to the way the party evolved.

Now, because we don't have any ideas in these parties, in fact, in this book I have just written, one of my most fascinating points was made by a former head of service, Professor Afolabi. He said that civil servants show up these days; they don't come to work. They show up because the political parties don't know where they want society to go. Civil servants travel around for conferences and events and wait for the day somebody from their village is powerful enough to make them a permanent secretary. Then, they look for how much federal government resources they can bring to their people. You can't build a country like that. Professor Afolabi was dead right. If the political passes had a certain worldview, what the Germans would call a Weltanschauung<sup>6</sup> and then within those set of worldviews, reduce social problems to some strategies and based on these, everybody from the permanent secretary to level eight civil servants know what they must be doing for the government to get to where it is going. So, without this, they sit around, and the country goes nowhere. So, back to your main question. You need to have a disciplined system of ideation that enables problems to be solved appropriately. So, back to Balogun's question, it is not the lack of basic knowledge; it's a matter of rigour. The process is not rigorous enough for them to find solutions.

I don't think a political party has meaning if it doesn't have a frame of understanding for how to solve problems.

**Okigbo:** Professor Tunji Olaopa raised his hand, and you referenced him extensively in the book. Let's bring him in to comment, but before I bring him in, I need to mention that on March 06, 2024, I will be having a chat with Salihu Lukman Muhammad, former National Vice Chairman of the ruling All Progressives Congress, on internal party politics, internal democracy

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<sup>6</sup> [Welt-an-schau-ung] noun: a particular philosophy or view of life; the worldview of an individual or group.

within the party and how to build up political parties in Nigeria to become more effective. But Professor Olaopa, you've got the floor.

**Professor Tunji Olaopa:** Thank you very much. I would like to congratulate Professor Utomi on the book. I have not seen it, but I am anxiously awaiting my copy. I picked up a bit of the conversation and wanted to weigh in on some of the issues that are building up. Whether we are referencing Plato, philosopher king theory that democracy is the rule of oligarchy or the role of the elite in the rise and fall of civilisation, I think elite nationalism will still be highly essential for us to get a better handle on the leadership sophistication that we require to salvage the Nigeria project.

I always thought that despite all that might be said about poor elite nationalism and the prebendal culture, there is a sufficiently critical mass of elite in Nigeria who are well-driven for us to get the country right. I accept your argument regarding the failure of the political party system. Our political parties need to be much more sophisticated, ideological, and democratic and be able to attract suitable technocratically minded professionals who also love to contribute to national development. The failure of the political party system makes it difficult to prepare our leaders for leadership regarding intergenerational mentorship. It takes a lot of preparation to occupy political positions. However, in Nigeria, people are technically unprepared.

The last thing missing in the political parties is that every serious political party needs to have a strong backend of think tanks. For instance, the Democratic Party in the United States has The Brooklyn Institution. There is also the fact that many serious-minded ministers wanted to drive change and came in with strong technocratic knowledge. However, the bureaucracy could not activate the force of a capable state.

**Okigbo:** Thank you, Professor Olaopa. Your most recent book, [\*The Unending Quest for Reforms\*](#), is one anyone interested in these topics should seek. Professor Utomi, we have a question from an Obi Emekekwe from New York, *"Thank you very much for an interesting presentation, Pat, my concern is that most of the discussions take place with people who are not directly involved in policy implementation. How can the policy implementers engage more effectively in the required change to drive the country's development?"*

**Utomi:** Thank you. It goes back to the same question about political parties because the role of political parties is to socialise a generation into a specific worldview that they can employ to solve social problems. For instance, you join the Conservative Club as a high school student in the UK. You get to Oxford and join the same club. By the time you graduate, you are grounded in some fundamental, philosophical perspectives on how to solve certain kinds of problems. Political campaigns are supposed to be about taking those issues to the streets. South Korean politics used to be like Nigerian politics, with godfatherism and all sorts of things. They solved the problem when their electoral commission decided that they would deal with the issue through debates. You cannot hold any office in South Korea if you don't debate on the streets, in classrooms, in gyms, and on Television. Godfathers ran away because they couldn't do that. Only people who could think stayed in politics. You can see the effect in South Korea today.

**Okigbo:** Exactly. As an aside, when Buhari became president in 2015, my firm Nextier published a paper where we outlined how to select his ministers. We suggested slightly, tongue in cheek, that he should have them debate on TV for the different portfolios they wanted to be appointed to. Obviously, that did not gain any traction.

We've got maybe two more questions as we get into the last five minutes of this session. This one is from Juliana Stoyanova. *"Faith-based organisations play an important role in the lives of Nigerians. Can they have a more pronounced role in solving Nigeria's development problems?"* The second one is from Atinuke Odenima. *"You mentioned that rationale, public conversation in Nigeria is poor. May I ask who is responsible for holding these conversations? Should it be the public, private, or civil society organisations?"*

**Utomi:** So, let me start with Tinuke's question. It's everybody. I listen to the radio. We have what we call the tyranny of drivers. You get into a car; your driver chooses the station to which he wants you to listen. He turns the radio on, and you listen. So, the tyranny of my driver is that I listen to one station, and they're promoting these debates amongst secondary schools quite a bit. So, that's an enormous contribution. Civil society organisations need to play a critical role. Politics is too important to be left to politicians. So, everybody needs to get involved in that.

For Juliana, faith-based organisations have value. They influence people so much in this culture that if the pastors get a proper education on some of these issues and use the pulpit to advance a better understanding of some of those, it will be great for development. I will give you an example. Years ago, Pastor Paul Adefarasin wrote a book on change and invited me to read and critique it. They asked me to speak about it in his church. I went a couple of times to do that. The only problem was that I went to visit a retired general. As I entered, he was trying to introduce me to the daughter. She said I know him, "he's a pastor in our church." I said, oh dear. I said, which church? She said Pastor Adefarasin's Church. Well, despite drawbacks like this, it could work well.

**Okigbo:** So again, like with everything in public policy, there are positives and negatives because if one is not careful with religious institutions, it could lead to certain other challenges.

We've got another question in the last two minutes or so from Jesse. *"Beyond the implementation of public policy, the process of developing scientific, objective-based public policy is equally critical. When public policy is not developed from empirical realities and evidence. Implementation of such policies becomes impracticable. How do you think the politics of side-lining social scientists and researchers, like the Prof. by the political elite, affect public policy development and, by extension, its implementation? I think you already spoke to this, but maybe it's just to underline it."*

**Utomi:** The difference between the Ziks and Awolowos and today's politicians is that the former surrounded themselves with intellectuals. You look around Zik, and you see Pius Okigbo and so forth. You turn to today. All the people around them are politicians. So, how do they come up with interesting ideas other than how to have a party? So, we have this fundamental problem. We've got to change the culture of politics in Nigeria. Academics and intellectuals have a critical role to play.

There is another important thing we have lost now, which Americans do very well: the oscillation of elites. In the book, I talked about my own experience. My dean, Charles Bonser, had returned from Washington, where he was Assistant Secretary of State to Otis Bowen, then Health and Human Services Secretary. They were considering him to return to the Reagan administration by the time I was writing my dissertation. Eventually, he didn't get the position. However, I saw my teachers take off, go to Washington, serve two to three years in an administration, and then move to Wall Street and return to university. So, you had this oscillation of elites that enriched the United States' capacity for making choices. In Nigeria, we don't have it, unfortunately.

**Okigbo:** So, there is a question on where to get the book. It came out yesterday. I am sure your publisher, Bookcraft, will get it into Amazon and Nigerian bookstores.

Let's have your last word on the theme of this conversation, which is how do we make reforms succeed. So maybe in the last 30 seconds, you can wrap it up for people who are listening, both in government, civil society, etc. What are some of the key elements that must be in place for reforms to work within the Nigerian context?

**Utomi:** Thank you. You have to look at what kind of reform is needed, just like change management in the private sector. Think about what happened with IBM when it was in bad shape after being one of the most successful companies in the world. They decided that the kind of reform they wanted was to change the organisation's culture. They fired the entire leadership and then went to get somebody who didn't know anything about computers. They hired Louis V. Gerstner Jr from RJR Nabisco, who wrote [Who Says Elephants Can't Dance](#). So, that's one kind of reform. It's not always going to be that kind of reform. So, reforms that change the momentum of an organisation are different from reforms that shift a culture. So, you will look at the critical element of the particular kind of reform that you are trying to implement and, therefore, align appropriately to achieve the goal you are looking for.

**Okigbo:** Excellent. Thank you so much, Professor Utomi, for your time with us on this conversation. As I said, we will send out the video and the notes. Secondly, to say that some of the points we have made here around training for people in public policy, we want to thank Professor Olaopa for the work he is doing with the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy as a place to train administrators, politicians, et cetera, on how to drive policy reforms. Thirdly, on the policy reforms. In two weeks, my guest will be Dr Mo Adefeso, the founder of The Education Partnership. She is a fellow at the Brookings Institution. We will focus on education policy and the role of private schools for the poor. It's going to be on February 21, two weeks from today, at the same time, at 3 p.m. West Africa time. Hopefully, you can join us as we continue to ideate for Africa's development.

Thank you very much for joining us, and we hope you join us next time.