

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR GOOD **GOVERNANCE**

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Going through the agenda for this sixth Nigerian Economic Summit which is the first under an elected civilian government, I am concerned that good governance is virtually absent from the agenda.

This summit brings together senior business and government leaders in a national forum at which governance should have as of right been a central issue. The organized private sector in Nigeria has long advocated the creation of 'an enabling environment'. With the establishment of an elected civilian government, good governance should be a prime concern at this summit lest it become just another annual talkshop.

Institutionalizing good governance in Nigeria will entail effective partnerships of what I like to describe as the Five Estates of the Realm - the Executive, Legislature, Judiciary, Media and Civil Society (civil society is also increasingly referred to as the 'Third Sector', the first sector being government in its broadest sense and the second being the private sector).

However, the relationship in the recent past between the organized private sector and civil society organizations in Nigeria has not always been as might have been desired. It is now accepted that business thrives best in stable and democratic countries in which the rule of law and human rights is accorded primacy. The organized private sector and the civil society organizations are part of civil society in its broader sense, which is the basis of a stable and democratic polity. The global trend is for the private sector and civil society organizations to cooperate in promoting democracy and good governance. Supporting the promotion of good governance and a culture of the rule of law and respect for human rights is in the direct interest of the private sector. A government that is committed to the rule of law will not expropriate the property of private companies, seal up factories and business premises without due process or collect taxes at gunpoint. The establishment of effective mechanisms to curb endemic corruption reduces the costs of doing business and levels the playing field. Some examples of business-civil society partnerships include –

The partnership between Reebok, the U.S. sports wear and equipment manufacturer and human rights organizations in the U.S.

The establishment of and support by business of endowments such as the Soros Foundation/Open Society Institute which supports democracy, human rights and governance around the world

The corporate management principles of companies such as Body Shop which, inter alia, sets aside funds from its profits to support environmental and human rights causes around the world

An African model of government-business-civil society partnerships can be found in South Africa. I serve on the Steering Committee of the Nigeria-South Africa Dialogue, an initiative to build bridges of understanding and cooperation between business and civil society in South Africa and Nigeria. An effective partnership between Nigeria and South Africa is critical to peace, economic development, democracy and good governance in Africa. It is instructive that in South Africa, government, business and civil society organizations have established an effective framework for inter-action and cooperation in national policy making and implementation. South Africa has a Minister of Civil Society. The Foundation for Global Dialogue is the vehicle through which the South African government pursues its African Renaissance programme. A key part of the South African framework, is the establishment in 1995 by the South African government and donor agencies of the National Development Fund, an endowment which supports civil society organizations working to promote, inter alia, democracy, human rights and good governance in South Africa. Whereas the imperative of government-business-civil society cooperation is well understood and an effective structure for government, business and civil society interface in policymaking exists in South Africa, this is wholly lacking in Nigeria. I throw the following challenge before this summit - initiate a process for the establishment of effective partnerships for good governance in Nigeria.

The private sector in Nigeria must commit to democracy and they must put their money where their mouth is. Civil society organizations have built up over the years, considerable expertise and resources in governance issues. Speaking only for my immediate constituency, human rights organizations have done a lot of work in terms of research, advocacy, training, publications etc on governance. Non-governmental organizations working in rural development, water supply and sanitation, agriculture, education, healthcare etc have equally done a great deal of work. The task before us is to harness these resources and match them with funding to take Nigeria forward. The resources and expertise of civil society organizations can be put to good use for national development but this will have maximum impact within the context of effective partnerships for good governance. This then is the challenge before us –

1. to put good governance at the centre of economic policy and planning
2. to build effective partnerships between business, civil society and government
3. to enhance the capacity of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group to deliver on these objectives.