

CITIZEN DIPLOMACY IN PRESIDENT UMARU MUSA YAR'ADUA'S NIGERIA, 2007-2009: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Citizen Diplomacy – a foreign policy thrust, under which the Federal Government of Nigeria seeks the assistance of Nigerians at home and in diaspora in its effort to develop the country economically and politically. Being people oriented, it is a part of the broad range of Nigeria's foreign policy that promotes the aspects that look into the welfare of Nigeria's citizens and seek to defend them whatever they are. The paper argues that, the adoption of Citizen Diplomacy by the Federal Government does not seem to have changed the poor perception about Nigeria because of the inability of Nigeria's leadership to clearly define her national interest. The paper recommends that Nigeria's foreign policy should be urgently reviewed and re-packaged in the light of the new realities of the globalized world order, to make it more efficient, responsive, dynamic and proactive, based on citizen diplomacy.

Keywords: *Citizen Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Citizen, Welfare.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Nigerian Government adopted a new foreign policy approach based on what the former Foreign Affairs Minister, Chief Ojo Maduekwe has since called 'Citizen Diplomacy'. From a different tangent of articulation and understanding, Citizen Diplomacy is construed by Nigeria to mean that Nigeria's foreign policy will henceforth be focused on the Nigerian citizens at home and in diaspora. According to the foreign Minister, this is not necessarily a departure from the country's traditional approach to foreign relations in which Africa is taken as the centre-piece; however, the policy is rebranded to focus on the citizen (Bakare, 2007:7). The country will strive for a synergy between foreign policy and domestic affairs in such a way that the citizen is taken as the focus of foreign policy. In the view of Ozoemenam Mbachu (2007:9), the basic thrust of the new foreign policy initiative revolve around concerns for the basic needs, human rights and socio-

economic welfare of Nigerian citizens in bilateral and multilateral engagements with other countries.

This article examines citizen diplomacy and the extent to which this new foreign policy approach have yielded the envisaged result in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications: Diplomacy

Although diplomacy has been variously defined, scholars have argued that, no general definition of diplomacy can be very satisfactory or very revealing (Palmer and Perkins, 2004: 84). A charming characterization, though attacked to be vague and inadequate, is given by Ernest Satow (1966:1), who defines diplomacy as “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states”. This definition was criticized for obvious reasons – not all diplomats are either intelligent or tactful, yet they all take part in diplomacy (Ogunsanwo, 200:1).

Geoffrey McDermott (1973:37) sees diplomacy as “a science which permits its practitioners to say nothing and shelter behind mysterious nods of the head..., a science whose most successful exponent is he who can swim with his head above streams of events he pretends to conduct”. Morgenthau, one of the leading exponents of realism (1978: 529), described diplomacy as “the technique for accommodating conflicts of interest, and the promotion of national interest by peaceful means.” According to him, taken in its widest meaning, comprising the whole range of foreign policy, the task of diplomacy is fourfold:

First, diplomacy must determine its objectives in the light of the power actually and potentially available for the pursuit of these objectives. Second, diplomacy must assess the objectives of other nations and the power actually and potentially available for the pursuit of these objectives. Third, diplomacy must determine to what extent these objectives are compatible with each other. Fourth, the diplomacy must employ the means suited to the pursuit of its objectives.

He exhorted that, failure in any of these tasks may jeopardize the success of foreign policy and with it the peace of the world.

However, a more comprehensive definition which underscores its essence and *raison d'être* is that:

Diplomacy is the political process whereby states establish and nurture official inter-relations, direct and indirect, to pursue their respective goals, interest and substantive and procedural policies in the international environment (Plischke, 1977:41).

Scholars overwhelmingly subscribed to the above definition as being the most comprehensive or all encompassing because, if statesmen or diplomats are asked why they take particular actions in their relations with certain international organizations, their response is likely to underscore the primacy of the national interest, thus implying that a nation's foreign policy is the expression of its national interests vis-à-vis those of other nation. Thus, whatever may be his country of accreditation, the principal duty of an Ambassador is to preserve and advance his country's national interests. In the view of Ogunbambi (1986:162), as it pertains to Nigeria, for instance:

The national interests of Nigeria which Ambassador, ideally, should sell and prosecute include political stability, security, export promotion, access to external resources and technology, foreign aid, the protection of its citizens abroad, the cultural and moral expressions of Nigeria and a fair, effective and vigorous presentation of Nigeria's point of view on regional and global issues.

Robinson (in Rosenau, 1969:189) corroborates the above viewpoint by maintaining that, the primary interest of all nations consists in the security of national territory and in safeguarding of the lives and values of the citizens. In the same vein, Holsti (1992:83) identifies the common objectives of states as falling into such categories as self-preservation, security, well-being, prestige, power and promotion and the protection of ideology.

Cutting a dichotomy between foreign policy and diplomacy, J. R. Childs (1984:64) posits that the foreign policy of a state is “the substance of foreign relations”, whereas “diplomacy proper is the process by which policy is carried out”. He argues further that, policy is made by many different persons and agencies, but presumably on major matters in any state, whatever its form of government; it is made at the highest level, though subject to many different kinds of controls. Then it is the purpose of diplomacy to provide the machinery and the personnel by which foreign policy is executed. One is the substance, the other is the method.

In the view of Karen Mingst (2004:113-114), diplomacy entails states trying to influence the behaviour of others by negotiating, by taking a specific action or refraining from such an

action, or by conducting public diplomacy. According to him, in using diplomacy to project power, a state might:

- Express to the target state, either publicly or privately, unhappiness with its policy choice.
- Suggest that a better relationship would follow if the target state's actions changed in a specific way.
- Threaten that negative consequences will follow if the target states continue to move in a specific direction.
- Turn to an international body to seek multilateral legitimization for its position, thus enlisting the support of other states on its behalf.
- Give the target state what it wants (diplomatic recognition, foreign aid) in return for desired actions.
- Remove what the target states wants (reduce foreign aid, withdraw diplomats, sever diplomatic tie) when it takes undesirable actions.

Diplomacy usually begins with bargaining, through direct or indirect communication, in an attempt to reach agreement on an issue. This bargaining may be conducted tacitly among the parties, each of which recognizes that a move in one direction leads to a response by the other.

From pre-historic times till date, every state has to operate within an international political environment in which her values compete with those of others such that states in the international system gear their efforts towards the maximization of the political, economic and social values. In order to minimize the effect of conflict and maximize individual states chances of realizing her objectives, diplomacy becomes the principal technique of state action or the main instrument for the execution of foreign policy – the principal device by which a state transmits or communicates its desire and designs into the decision-making apparatus of other states, whether in the form of persuasion and the modification or adjustment of ones position through coercion or negotiation.

Citizen Diplomacy

Though the concept 'citizen diplomacy' appears self-explanatory, it is not exactly so, more so, in the context of diplomacy as a political concept depicting the involvement of average citizens engaging representatives of another country or cause either inadvertently or by design (Agbu, 2007:9). Ozoemenam Mbachu (2007:9) sees Citizen Diplomacy as an organized action that

government takes to achieve the objectives that have been set by policy makers. And that the concept, as currently being employed denotes re-orientation of Nigeria's foreign policy pursuit towards beneficial economic and political engagement so as to meet up with the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals for Africa. According to him, this arose from the realization that the progress, prosperity and survival of the nation must be the concern of every Nigerian at home and in the Diaspora. According to Okocha and Nzeshi (2007:3), citizen diplomacy is geared towards "protecting" the image and integrity of Nigeria and retaliates against countries who are hostile and who brand Nigeria as corrupt (Okocha and Nzeshi, 2007). Giving reasons for the adoption of the policy, the progenitor (Cited in Adejumo, 2007) explains further:

Our foreign policy has come of age and the age of innocence is over. We remain proud of our track record from Tafawa Balewa up till now. The country that is the largest black nation in the world could not have done otherwise. A world where every sixth black man is a Nigerian could not have done otherwise, or where every four Africans is a Nigerian could not have done otherwise. We should ask ourselves some hard questions: to what extents has our foreign policy benefited Nigerians? To what extent has our foreign policy put food on our tables? In order words where is the citizen in our foreign policy?

Quoting Williams Dubois, the Minister said:

The colour of the skin remains the defining paradigm of international relations. And I think that it would not be out of naivety for the largest black country in the world not to be conscious of the fact that colour of corruption is black, so long as the colour of corruption is black, so long as the colour of HIV/AIDS is black, so long as the colour of ethnic conflicts is black ... all black people all over the world, whether they are Congress men in the United States or the United Kingdom, they will never walk proud any where in the world.

He opined that Nigeria carried enormous burden to be the symbol of the success of the black nation and there could never be a black story, "unless it is a Nigerian success story". Explained differently, citizen Diplomacy "is to ensure that our foreign policy becomes the most powerful way to express who we are..." And that we are not changing the fundamentals of our foreign policy but we are changing the branding.

Bola Akinterinwa (2007) explains further:

As conceptualized, individual Nigerians are to be the main focus of any foreign policy endeavour, they are to be made important stakeholders and first beneficiaries of Nigeria foreign policy efforts in any of Nigeria's foreign policy concentric circles. More important,

they are to be specially empowered to respond to the changing challenges of globalization wherever they may be found.

He pointed out challenges before Nigerian government in practicalising this new foreign approach to include, prevention of Nigerians seeking visas in accredited diplomatic missions from indecent treatment; how to ensure that Nigerian is respected at home and abroad; and most importantly, how to make Nigerian business entrepreneurs take advantage of Nigeria's regional and sub-regional peace-making and peace-building efforts.

Alaba Ogunsanwo (2007: 3) argues that, citizen diplomacy could mean that, from now on the Nigerian citizen abroad is the centre of Nigeria's national interest and therefore the country's entire diplomatic machinery should be geared towards protecting his or her interest – economic welfare etc. He further pointed out that, any diplomacy that does not take this into consideration will not be appropriate for our diplomatic missions abroad.

As succinctly pointed out by Osita Eze (2007: 8), Citizenship Diplomacy articulates, what is or should be implicit as the major goal of our foreign policy. Being people – oriented, it is a step in further stating that both national and international actions will be driven primarily by the need to promote the welfare and security of citizens.

Citizen Diplomacy: An Assessment

From 2007 to date, citizen diplomacy seems not to have yielded the envisaged dividend due to some factors that are both domestic and international. According to Reuben Abati (2009), placing the citizen at the centre of the national programme reinforces the original purpose of the Government and when those in power provide necessary leadership, they will without much effort secure the trust of the general populace and create centres of national solidarity and more agents for national progress. In Nigeria, we don't seem to get this. Our Governments do not value our lives. One Nigerian was killed in Spain, another one was brutalized in Asia, routinely, our people are beheaded in Saudi Arabia. At home and in Diaspora, Nigerians are left to their own survival tactics; many have learnt not to expect anything from their government. Regretting the plight of Nigerians abroad, he stated further:

Those who live abroad often complain about the cruelty of Nigerian embassy officials: to renew their passports, to get Nigerian passport or visas for their dual – nationality children could be a nightmare.

Reconnecting the state to the citizen and vice versa is a major area of needed intervention for all Nigerians. Back home, the average Nigerian is treated badly by the authorities. For instance, the Nigerian Police Force vested with the responsibility of maintaining internal peace and security have in all ramifications become agents of terrorism engaging in extra-judicial killing, arrest, and detention of innocent citizens, extortion of multifarious dimensions, and brutality etc.

On Sunday, January 3, 2009, a detachment of Policemen on patrol in Illorin, the Kwara State capital shot a taxicab when the driver allegedly failed to stop for inspection and subsequent payment of amount ranging from N20.00 to N100.00, while the bullets hit on a nursing mother, Titilayo Olutunde, aged 20 years and her eight months old baby late Anuoluwa and they died. Titilayo and her daughter's brutal murder by the Police have since occupied front burner in legal interpretation (Jimoh, 2010). The question now is, what kind of citizen diplomacy are we talking about?

In recent time, instances abound that when an innocent citizen is kidnapped by the perpetrators of this dastardly act, on informing the state Government or Police authority, instead of rising to the challenges posed by this act of criminality, they will ask relatives of the victim to negotiate with them (kidnappers) and to pay a ransom as may be demanded. Then what is the role of the government in the security of its citizens?

In addition to the pervasive inhuman condition of everything, human lives are worthless in Nigeria. Internally, over 750 persons have been killed in the course of sectarian violence in Northern Nigeria in recent time. On recurrent crisis in Jos, Sanya Oni (2010) argues that 150 people were killed and stuffed in wells and sewages in a small village Kuru – Jantar. Innocent lives have been lost. But nobody knows who the victims are because there is no citizens' database.

In the views of Abba Mahmood (2009), with the President lacking international exposure and most of the Ministers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also lacking any broad experience in diplomacy, there is no wonder that, in foreign policy, this government has not made any appreciable impact. Nigeria's voice is not heard in major international fora; Nigeria has initiated nothing spectacular in the last two years at the dynamic global arena and, apart from bilateral agreements which are hardly followed up, Nigeria has gained nothing from diplomatic activities under this administration. This is not what is expected of the anchor nation of the Black world.

In the immediate sub – region of ECOWAS whose institutions Nigeria is hosting and substantially funding, Nigerians are not even employed as drivers. As succinctly put by Andrew

Obinna Onyearu (2009), not only did the country – Nigeria donate substantially towards ECOWAS set up costs including the Secretariat, it regularly paid its annual contribution of approximately 32.5% of the Community’s budget which was subsequently revised upwards to 40%. In the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice only 7percent of the staff are Nigerians, and it is situated here in Abuja. At the African Union since 2003 when Obasanjo fielded two female candidates from Nigeria for the same post, making the country look unserious, no Nigerian has been elected in the AU Commission for the last six years. A nation that has the largest population in Africa is not represented in the African Union Commission. Burkina Faso defeated Nigeria in 2007! Really, what manner of citizen diplomacy is it when the citizens lack representation?

Another case in point which undermined Nigerian citizen diplomacy is the matter that involved Dr. Ngozi Ugo. Abba Mahmood narrated that, she is a citizen of Nigeria who had done so much for the UN for so many years especially in the area of human rights, international law, conflict transformation and peace-building etc. and was able to win a host of international awards. The UN found her worthy of being nominated for the position of Assistant Secretary- General of the UN on three different occasions including under the present government of Barak Obama. From 2007 to date, she has been nominated for the position of UN Ombudsman, deputy special representative of the secretary-general etc, all equivalent to the position of assistant secretary-general, a position that required the endorsement of her home government Nigeria. But between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the utterly discredited office of the Attorney-General of the Federation, they kept dribbling her until she lost. What manner of citizen diplomacy is it when on merit a citizen is found worthy of holding a very important position by the whole world but her country refused to endorse her?

As Mahmood precisely observed:

Dr. Ugo’s presence in the UN System would have enhanced Nigeria’s position for the UN permanent seat. Other more serious countries campaign for their citizens and that is why the highest ranking African in the UN system is a Tanzanian woman. Go to the Commonwealth Secretariat in London you may think you are in India’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs because of the number of Indians there. And this is where our own Chief Anyaoku served for almost four decades. When is Nigeria going to stand and recognize its own? It is sad, unfortunate and indeed painful (Mahmood, 2009).

Another area of assessing citizen diplomacy is to proffer answers to pertinent questions raised by Akintokumbo Adejumo (2007). He asked, “how helpful have been Nigeria foreign

missions all over the world towards Nigerians living abroad, for instance”? Infact, coming to think of it, in generality, how helpful have Nigeria governments been to even Nigerians living in Nigeria, not to talk of the ones abroad? In his thought-provoking answers, he said:

There are too many instances of neglect to be mentioned, but it is all the same sad stories. Nigerian diplomats have never taken care of either our image or the Nigerians living abroad.

Abba Mahmood further observed that, the concept – citizen diplomacy is yet to be properly articulated, its impact is yet to be felt and the result is yet to manifest.

Conclusion and Policy Prescription

Since its postulation, citizen diplomacy has been subjected to the most anxious but well meaning scrutiny by domestic and international commentators. The policy has attracted praise and criticism in like manner. Its critics, according to Onyearu (2009) appear to be queuing up behind the much vaunted rehearsal of some of Nigeria’s well documented problems. He stressed further that these drawbacks – and they are significant – make it either inappropriate or impossible that Nigeria is to orientate its policy in this direction. Those critics alleged that we have neither the moral, social nor economic foundation to seek reciprocity in our dealings with foreign nations. According to him:

This thinness of social-economic capacity is based on community repeated premises that Nigeria has some of the worst social indicators in the world; internal insecurity; a deteriorating infrastructural base; corruption; high crime; unbridled violence; ethnic conflict; a disorganized and moribund labour sector; a poor external image crisis exacerbated by a world-wide reputation for astuteness in financial and other related crimes represent some of these problems. Add to this highly inflammable cocktail is High mortality – a majority of the population ostensibly living below the poverty line in a country where the life expectancy is at zero point, and you get a country with a supposedly fragile base and foundation upon which such a policy can be founded.

For the Citizen Diplomacy to succeed, it must be backed up with the sincerity of purpose and approach to Nigeria’s entire problem at home. Adejumo Adetokumbo posits that, “it is not good enough to know that after almost fifty years as a nation, and blessed with the kind of resources – human and material – that we have, our people are still wallowing in abject poverty and desperation, while our leaders are looting the treasures all over the country, and living

unimaginable expensive lifestyles and spiriting the loot out of Nigeria and depositing it in the countries we are trying to force this citizen diplomacy on.”

Nigeria must develop an agenda of engagement. This would entail creating a mechanism to investigate and deal with any adverse publicity reports relating to Nigeria. This would help in identifying and collating all incidents of adverse publicity. As observed by Andrew Onyearu;

Presently, this machinery does not exist and serious consideration should be given to establishing the mechanism. Doing this will import proactive involvement and in consequence, familiarity with a slippery and inherently embarrassing terrain. The familiarity is essential to amongst other factors, build a template responses to problems of a similar nature re-occurring in the future (2009).

This implies that Nigerian Mission abroad must be employed to assume these responsibilities. Operational directions must be formulated; issued and implemented worldwide within Nigerian high commissions and embassies. It is critical that resources are made available for this purpose. Additionally, there should be enhanced monitoring of the missions’ activities to ensure that identified objectives are being met.

As pointed out by Kabir Mato (2009), Nigerian Missions abroad especially in those countries where Nigerians are facing difficulties due to the behaviour of few disgruntled citizens must step up effort and copy Marwa initiative if only to discourage those who are dubious and encourage hard-work dignity and honest living. Nigerians abroad must be sensitized to the peculiar responsibilities of nationalism. Okon Eminue (2001: 143) points out that, this kind of nationalism aims at strengthening and consolidating independence in the political, economic, cultural, intellectual and other spheres. According to him, in the African context, nationalism is a desire for personal emancipation, a claim for equality of status, a right for personal dignity, self-respect, full participation in the things of material world, and a consistent effort to rescue Africans from their conditions of acquired inferiority to which they have been relegated through the years. This implies that “Nigerianness” abroad must dip significantly until the gains of democracy began to take root. Information dissemination amongst Nigerians must be initiated and improved upon. Nigerians must begin to appreciate that the biggest advocates of Nigerianness are Nigerians themselves. The support structure and the linkage between Nigerians abroad and at home should be the Embassies and High Commissions abroad.

The introduction of citizen Diplomacy in Nigeria is desirable, noteworthy and must be pursued – it is a policy that is inherently proactive, decidedly dynamic, full of zip and conceived to

achieve. Rather than ventilate unproductive drawbacks, the ministry of foreign Affairs should be wholeheartedly encouraged and supported, using incisive critical appraisal not as a tool to denigrate but as an encouragement, advice and information.

As Abba Mahmood (2009) counseled, the Federal Government should sit up and study Nigeria's Foreign policy machinery and try to make it more dynamic, more focused and more responsive to the needs of vibrant citizen diplomacy. Staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be given adequate training to perform their duties more effectively, not downsizing "as canvassed for by the Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) on Foreign Relations. This is a scientific era when Nigeria needs meticulous planning and deployment of sufficient skills to achieve her goals.

Nigerian foreign policy should be urgently reviewed and re-packaged in the light of the new realities of the globalized world order, to make it more efficient, responsive, dynamic and proactive, based on citizen diplomacy. Citizen Diplomacy, if well articulated and pursued with passion could lead to better management and allocation of resources, freeing resources to meet the pressing needs of citizens everywhere.

In the same vein, Mbachu, O. (2007) is of the opinion that, future success of Citizen Diplomacy requires serious review of Nigerian foreign policy. Nigerian foreign policy must be fashioned to be result-oriented and directed at aggressively pursuing her interest in Africa and around the world. The era of "Father Christmas", "Big Brother" and "Free Breakfast" should be considered to be over in view of the new economic realities at home and globalization trend the world over.

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