

from the desk of

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NIGERIA NEEDS HEROES NOW



So much has been said recently about the cost of governance. And at a time of such economic difficulty, high inflation and an almost unbearable cost-of-living, with so many people crying out and many others fleeing the country, the cost of governance is no doubt a valid social conversation to be had at this time.

But like many other issues in the public discourse, social commentary often has the tendency to over generalize; and broad assumptions may sometimes lead to errors of misconceptions, misstatements and misinformation.

One of such errors is in a recent case study that went viral on social media regarding the current media team of the President, where my name was listed as one of the President's media aides.

Unfortunately, this statement needs to be updated to accurately reflect the current media team of the President.

For clarity, I served briefly in the role of Senior Special Assistant to the President on National Values and Social Justice (SSA-NVSJ) for a tenure of six months, from October 2023 to March 2024.

But I will also provide additional context, within the public discourse about the cost of governance.

When I was invited to serve in this administration, I expressed, as a condition for accepting the call, my desire to NOT receive a salary from government as I considered this to be my service to my nation.

Those who know me well will attest to the fact that this is very consistent with my track record of about 20 years of serving my nation through several nation building initiatives, projects and programs all at a huge personal cost to myself and my family.



When I finally accepted the role in October 2023, it was on the condition that I would not receive any salary or allowances. During my six-month tenure, I did not accept any government funds for my service, expenses, or upkeep.

I rented my apartment and took my personal car to Abuja. My utility cost, fuel cost and upkeep were all borne by me and I never requested for a reimbursement from government for any expenses I incurred. Everything I contributed—time, effort, and resources—was paid for by me and my family.

Some may question why anyone would serve their nation for ‘free’. The answer is quite simple. Nigeria needs heroes (individuals willing to sacrifice for the greater good) especially at this time in our nation’s history.

Like fictional superheroes that most of us became accustomed to as children, real-life heroes step up in challenging times to make a difference, often times, at great personal expense.

My story of personal sacrifice is not unique. During my service, I met many unsung heroes in and out of government—dedicated individuals who serve without pay, sacrificing their time, careers, and resources to contribute to the nation. These are people with integrity, working tirelessly to move Nigeria forward, often in silence and without recognition.

I have met many heroes who took a pay cut to serve in government at federal and state levels. I met professionals who took a leave of absence from their thriving careers, some who put their businesses on hold and many who relocated home from the diaspora with no other intent than to serve the nation they love so dearly.

Many of these heroes have taken time away from their families and put their lives on hold to serve their nation, all for no financial reward or financial gain. They are not in government to steal. They are not in government to loot. They are not corrupt. Their hands are not stained. They are only there to serve.

For sure, this is NOT something that I would expect every single person to understand, believe or even appreciate. If you, like some others will say, “It is a lie joor ... abegi!!! ... Nobody goes into government for anything other than the money and power“, then I will not begrudge you. Truth is, not everyone loves their nation and I can never blame those who don’t carry the love for their nation in their heart. So, I will understand your plight and only hope that someday, you may get to meet one of the several real life heroes in the Nigerian government, serving selflessly at the federal, state and local government levels.

Better still, I hope that after reading this, you may also consider becoming a hero and volunteer in government or in the private sector, civil society, academia or whatever capacity you may wish to serve our nation because Nigeria needs you to be a hero, especially at this time.

I must acknowledge heroes like Jimi Tewe, Evelyn Paul, Simi Afilaka, Steve Harris, Ayanyinka Ayanlola, Tosin Babatunde, Seyi Oyemade, Semilore Adewale and others who formed the core of my team to support my mission to develop a NATIONAL PLAN for civic engagement. These are amazing human beings who volunteered their time and resources for six months WITHOUT PAY.

My mandate as SSA-NVSJ was to create a plan to facilitate the largest-ever civic engagement program in our nation's history through inspirational public messaging, transformational values-leadership training sessions and nation building conferences.

For a period of six months, these 'heroes' worked tirelessly with me to create and refine a strategic plan to inspire and engage a critical mass of NATION BUILDERS.

These are Nigerians, young and old, across our nation and in diaspora, who will accept responsibility to build the Nigeria we all want, the Nigeria we all love and the Nigeria we all will be so proud of.

Our strategic plan clearly articulated a path to the following measurable outcomes by the 31st of December 2025:

- Make 100 million Nigerians consciously aware of the drive to build 'The Nigeria We Want' through the largest civic engagement initiative in Nigeria's history.
- Inspire 50 million (which is 1-in-4) Nigerians to consciously commit to live a lifestyle of leadership and excellence as articulated in a personal creed that will be translated into different languages, so as to deeply connect with the hearts of young and older Nigerians nationwide and in diaspora, using print, television, radio, and online media platforms.
- Sign up and onboard at least 500,000 compatriots to a Nation Builders Network, where they will be actively engaged in social impact projects that will accelerate our national development process.

- Ensure that at least 5 million Nigerians nationwide are directly gainfully employed through these nation building projects across diverse sectors.
- Show with irrefutable proof that the lives of at least 50 million Nigerians have been positively impacted by the projects being implemented by these nation builders that have been mobilized, mentored and managed by our Nation Builders Network.
- Facilitate a SERVICE REVOLUTION training for ONE MILLION public officers and civil servants on 'Values-Based Leadership for Personal Excellence and Professional Excellence', resulting in an improved culture of SERVICE EXCELLENCE across the entirety of the public sector at the federal, state and local government levels. This training will be done nationwide AT NO COST TO THE GOVERNMENT, through private sector donors and the support of certified leadership trainers and project management experts

Please remember that when I was invited to create this plan, I accepted the role as a clarion call to serve my beloved nation. Since my appointment was for a voluntary service and not a paid position in government, I was therefore onboarded as a volunteer and exempted from the government's Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS).

Also, within the period of six months that I volunteered in government, neither myself nor my team received any funding from government, nor from any donor.

We also did not receive any office space, official vehicles or office equipment. None of our expenses were paid for by government and we did not ask for reimbursements for any expenses incurred in our personal or official capacities. In essence, my entire period of six months in government did NOT cost the Federal Government of Nigeria One Naira or as is sometimes said, One Kobo.

My team meritoriously served our nation without increasing the cost of governance or adding to our national budget.

They dedicated themselves, their time and their resources to creating a national plan that would galvanize citizens to engage as nation builders and build the Nigeria we want; an excellent Nigeria of our dreams.

In my opinion, these guys are some of our national heroes worthy of commendation.

Some members of our NVSJ team including Jimi Tewe, Simi Afilaka and Steve Harris live on the US/Pacific time zone, which meant that for six months, they were literally awake from 2am their time (weekdays and weekends) working round the clock to attend strategy meetings in Nigeria, all without pay.

Jimi Tewe took two trips to Nigeria for our team. Both trips were self-funded and he never asked for a ticket refund. Now these are just some of the heroes who served with me in government at huge personal cost, never asking for what they could get in return.

George Omoraro and the team at RAGE MEDIA produced and printed hundreds of documents (of world class quality) at huge costs to his organization and at NO COST to the government. The Rage Media team sometimes had to plead with their print partners to work on Sundays just to print out documents required for approval at short notice. The Rage Media team never complained and George never asked for a payment or reimbursement for the production, operations and delivery costs; rather just always so grateful for the opportunity to serve.

George Omoraro and the Rage Media team are the kind of heroes Nigeria needs at this time.

Izehi Anuge, Bankole Williams, Peter Eze, Abayomi Awobokun, Pade Durotoye, Gbolade Adewole, Jide Adekola, Seyi Adisa, Lanre Olusola, Adekoyejo Oyewumi ... all took time out of their busy schedule to share practical concepts for how to best engage a nation (of cynics, critics and contributors) and infuse values of personal leadership and excellence into our national consciousness.

None of them asked for anything in return for their time and effort, but gave everything they could for the success of the mission. These are heroes volunteering to serve without any government position or title, yet serving in advisory capacity from the private sector at huge personal and reputational cost.

Now, are there villains in government? Absolutely!!! We all know that some people are in government for what they will get, steal and take for themselves. Some people are there for the title and the power associated with the trappings of appointments and the paraphernalia of government.

Nonetheless, my point is that we often fall for the erroneous belief that everyone in government is a villain, and therefore cast aspersions on anyone whose appointment has been announced in the public domain.

Some people believe that every one of these ‘government appointees’ are just like the villains in government and anyone accepting to serve in government has gone to join ‘them’ to loot our public treasury and steal our Commonwealth.

It is so easy for us to ‘rain’ insults on these appointees especially when the government in which they serve is not formed by the political party we supported during election campaigns.

But we sometimes forget that governance (unlike politics) touches the lives of all citizens regardless of political affiliation, religious beliefs and tribal sentiments. If the government fails, we all suffer. The price of tomato, fuel pump price and foreign exchange rates are all the same for everyone, whether or not we support the government in power.

Getting our best and brightest minds to volunteer at every level of government, at little or no cost to our nation, is critical to our national development regardless of which party we align with or which candidate we support.

‘Dragging’ appointees and trolling them on WhatsApp group chats and social media commentary will only serve to discourage our heroes, whilst having absolutely no impact on the villains going into the government to loot the treasury.

This may be why many heroes needed in government today are outrightly rejecting or still hesitating to accept the clarion call to serve our nation. Some of them are not even willing to be seen anywhere around the decision makers in government for fear of social media retribution.

I will say it again, loud and clear, not everyone in government is a thief. Some are just heroes doing great and tireless work without adding a single penny to the cost of governance and our national budget. Many of these heroes are ordinary citizens (like you and I) who are tired of complaining and choose to try to make a difference through their ‘little’ contribution.

During my brief stint in government, I met several of such heroes whose unpaid efforts inspire hope that we can altogether build the Nigeria of our dreams.

Will their efforts be enough to change decades of decadence in governance? Maybe not. But they will rather try than cry. And they will do what they can to serve our nation with integrity and excellence, against all odds.

The truth is, Nigeria needs heroes, now more than ever. We need heroes in government at all levels. We need heroes in the public sector agencies and heroes in the private sector businesses. We need superheroes volunteering in NGOs and civil society organizations.

These heroes must emerge at this critical juncture of our nation's history. These heroes must commit their time, energy, expertise and resources towards the advancement of social development initiatives in the areas of:

- H** Hunger, Healthcare, HumanRights
- E** Education, Employment, Entertainment
- R** Roads, Rehabilitation and Religious Tolerance
- O** Orientation, Orphanages & Vulnerable Persons (Widows, Elderly, Special Needs and Internally Displaced Persons)
- E** Energy & Electricity, Environment
- S** Safety & Security, Shelter, Service Excellence, Sports, Sexual Exploitation and Social Justice.

Nigeria needs heroes who will serve with purpose, adding value without necessarily adding to the cost of governance. We need excellent advisers and assistants to local government counselors and council chairmen, DGs of agencies, commissioners and governors, ministers and the President.

Please also remember that not every legislator has gone into the legislative chambers to steal. Some legislators just need a team of credible and competent advisers and assistants to craft the right bills into law. Perhaps, even the 'legislooters' can change for the better with the right counsel and advise. If the right people don't advise them, then the wrong advisers will most certainly have their say and have their way. Nature abhors vacuum.

All said, if you can, please volunteer to serve in government, civil society or the private sector. Serve without the stain of corruption, serve with excellence and give your best for our nation. If you are unable to serve, do well to encourage and support those who are willing to risk their lives, families and reputation to serve our nation. And please resist the urge to undermine, discourage or disparage them.

The labor of our heroes, past and present, shall never be in vain. Nigeria's greatness depends on the willingness of its people to rise and make sacrifices.

Be the HERO Nigeria needs today!

God bless you and May God bless Nigeria 🇳🇮.

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