

Keynote Address Presented by Hon. Odeunmi Olusegun Dokun at the Breakfast Policy Dialogue by Initiative for Policy Analysis Lagos on the theme: Moving from Regulation to Policy-Action: The Challenge at Protea Hotel Ikeja Lagos on the 17 October 2017.

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour to be invited to deliver the keynote address. I would like to thank the Initiative for Public Policy Analysis (IPPA) for inviting me to this Breakfast Policy Dialogue. As you all know, Nigeria comprises various ethnicities. That is one of the reasons Nigeria has a federal constitution through which each unit of the federation will be represented at the federal level, that is, through the Senate and the House of Representatives in which I have the unique honour of representing Ogo-Oluwa/ Surulere Federal Constituency in Oyo State.

All of us at the National Assembly represent the interest of citizens in our constituencies as well as citizens in other parts of Nigeria. Since Nigeria operates a federal constitution, both chambers (the Senate and House of Representatives) at the national level pass law for the good governance of Nigerians and for all and sundry to enjoy the dividends of democracy whereby the citizens are gainfully employed. The National Assembly thus make sure that we enact and pass bills that will make Nigeria a destination for foreign direct investment. The national assembly also expects all foreign businesses operating in Nigeria to have a level playing field and be able to conduct their businesses unhindered. While we remain open to foreign businesses, we are also determined to encourage and sustain local production of our consumables in order to boost the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and ultimately provide employment opportunities for our army of unemployed Nigerians.

You all know that Nigeria is gradually coming out of economic recession. One of the key responsibilities for government is to provide jobs for Nigerians and also create conditions for jobs to be created. Also you may recall that the federal government recently approved executive orders on the ease of doing business in Nigeria. I can tell you that this effort is already yielding fruits as the economy is picking up and easing Nigeria gradually out of recession. One of the things which the national assembly is committed to is that the value chain of each sector is sustained to avoid unwarranted job losses.

The present administration has addressed the recession by clearly emphasizing that we as government and the people of Nigeria must diversify our economy away from the over-reliance on oil and gas which has been subjected to uncertainties in the international oil market. We as a nation must utilise other God's given resources to the fullest. It is not just by accident that God has given us those resources. In addition, the government is also investing a lot of resources to revitalise the infrastructure and committed to building new ones. There are various legislative processes that are already in the national assembly to attain the latter.

Above all, we as your representatives clearly understand what majority of people we represent are passing through such as inadequate jobs, poor power supply, lack of good roads etc. While we are committed to provide as many jobs for Nigerians, I would also like to let you know that the private sector can also leverage on government's performance on job creation. The private sector can only create additional jobs if there is enabling environment for their businesses to flourish. This includes enactment of laws that are clear and unambiguous. The national assembly therefore will not legislate any business out of existence in Nigeria as long as such a business entity conforms to all laws duly enacted by the national assembly. The national assembly also appreciate the contribution of foreign entities doing businesses in Nigeria but let me assure you that we will not allow any foreign business entity operating in our shore to oppress or exploit Nigerians through the services they provide. We are duly committed to ensure that consumers' rights are protected.

As many of you would know, law making is the core function of the national assembly. Law-making is not as simple as many would think. For each law passed, an enormous amount of resources are usually expended to ensure it is extensively deliberated and to meet the objective for which it is developed as well as protect the rights of every citizen. At the same time, everyone must understand that enormous resources from tax-payers are expended into law-making and this resources must be used judiciously and not subject to personal/emotional beliefs of member(s). When a bill sails through the national assembly and signed into law, the execution of the law falls within the powers of the executive and the oversight responsibilities of the legislature. The implementation of the law signed falls within the ambit of the executive arm of government. Neither private citizens nor private sector stakeholders can enforce or coerce implementation of any law passed.

Globally, regulations are important as a way to forestall possible externalities. The recognition of the important role that regulations could play in bringing about a sustainable society is a key reason why legislative processes usually involves many stakeholders in order to ensure that the outcomes consider all shades of opinion. Without this, the law may not be balanced which will likely lead to lots of unintended consequences. The Nigeria's National Assembly has demonstrated this belief by ensuring that viewpoints of all actors are considered in the course of law-making. This is usually in form of public hearing and consultative/constituency meetings. Within the context of this gathering, the National Assembly has passed the National Tobacco Control Act (NTCA) which has since been signed into a law since May 2015. The bill successfully sailed through both chambers and signed by the president. There are still some concerns with NTCA in many quarters and as a member of the national assembly I am of the view that other members will be interested in addressing whatever concerns that each of the group has without compromising public interests. However, one of the challenges now is that the law is not being implemented as contained in the Act.

This worsens the operating environment for private sector actors who are government allies in job creation. It is not just accidental therefore that the Food, Beverage and Tobacco industry contracted by at the end of 2016 -2.7 percent in the last quarters from 5.8 percent in the third quarter in 2016, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. In the absence of effective implementation of the provisions as contained in the Act, reforming the Act may not be the appropriate way to go because lack of implementation has not provided a fertile ground to know what are actually wrong in the present provisions.

I strongly believe that laws should always be implemented first considering any reforms. They have to be tested, evaluated, gaps identified and addressed before new laws are introduced. Of course, the Act can only be implemented by the executive branch and not by the stakeholders in the sector. I want to enjoin everyone to join hands with the government in the implementation of the law and point out whatever gaps that may exist. As you all know, perfection is a process and every one of us are part of that process. I want this gathering to know that whatever Act passed by the national assembly is meant for the general well-being of the citizenry. We are your representatives and we are doing people's business.

Once again, thank you very much for the invitation extended to me and would like to thank other participants as well as all the panellists for their incisive comments.

Thank you very much.

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