

Alternate Uses for the Security Vote

I left Nigeria right after Higher School Certificate. I can honestly say that at that time few, if any, of my classmates had working for the government as a career objective. It should therefore come as no surprise that I had never heard of a “Security Vote” until about the year 2000. Today I read on the Internet that some governors in Nigeria deduct up to 25% of the allocation from Abuja as security vote and they do not have to account for this money. Wow!

For a state like Akwa Ibom, after Obong Attah successfully fought the Obasanjo led Federal Government to have the constitutionally mandated 13% Derivation funds paid to the state, the next administration walked into a windfall our state may never see again, especially with declining fortunes of crude oil for the foreseeable future. Ironically this huge influx of security vote money heralded the most insecure epoch in Akwa Ibom history. One therefore had to ask, how are these funds currently expended?

Circumstantial and anecdotal evidence suggests that the governors use these funds to build mansions for themselves, enrich their family members and sponsor praise singers and electoral terrorists to keep themselves in power. For example, the administration that took office in 2007 was reported on the Internet to have paid a brother of the new governor N11 billion as fees for clearing a single shipment for the government. If this was true, it was equivalent to giving a man a fish to eat instead of teaching him how to fish. I look around Akwa Ibom and I have not seen any development, which I know N11 billion could have generated.

The Bible says that nations perish because their leaders and peoples lack vision. A proof of this Biblical truth can be gleaned from the same era by taking a look at the first and signature project of that administration – the Tropicana. After N53 billion and counting, only a cinema house charging N100.00 per ticket is the only working part of the project. I doubt that on a good day that cinema house records up to one thousand customers. Now you do the math and see if Jesus will not return before we can recoup the monies invested. The hotel has not been completed and now more funds have to be sourced for

to complete this white elephant at a time of declining revenue. Surely there must be a better way to spend/invest this money.

There is another saying that a people deserve the type of governance they tolerate. So if our leaders are devoid of the vision for a better Akwa Ibom, the people should step in to inform about such vision and take steps to see that their suggestions are actually carried out. In order to have a vision for a better future, we must decipher the inadequacies of the present.

A key contributor to our lack of progress is that Ibibio people do not realize that they are a nation. They do not think as a nation. Nations plan for their future and future generations. We simply exist. A glaring example of this can be seen in Ibibio preparations or lack thereof for a possible disintegration of Nigeria. We say we do not want Biafra but many of us are now tenants on their family land which they sold to Biafrans who will not relocate should Nigeria break up. Besides buying your land they have married your daughters so that your grand children are de-facto Biafrans. Many successful countries in Europe have smaller populations and fewer resources than we have. We must begin to think as a nation.

Another serious defect in our collective character is our lack of support for a visionary leader when such appear and our quickness to abandon the vision to start something else that cannot be sustained. Had the original vision for the airport and hanger in Uyo been given the priority it deserves, International flights would be landing in Uyo and aircrafts would be serviced there today. Instead we have a useless Tropicana and foreign airlines are landing in Enugu that has an inferior runway to the one in Uyo. An international football match was recently moved from the world-class stadium in Uyo to PH because of lack of enough local fans that could afford the gate fee to come cheer our national team. Who is going to pay to watch a match in a good stadium when he has no steady job to maintain his family?

One other thing before I proffer my suggestions. How many people do you think live in Akwa Ibom state today who have seen a live Enin (Elephant), or Isantim (Hippopotamus), or Ikpokebok (Gorilla) in Ibibio land? Yet the fact that we have names for these animals says that we had them in our environment at a certain point in time but they have

been hunted to extinction in our locale. Had we been aware that in the beginning in Genesis, God gave us the responsibility to take care of the earth and we had a national consciousness we may have taken steps to prevent their extinction in our land. It is not too late to change our ways and take charge of our destiny in ALL of its ramifications.

A nation that cannot feed itself can never be free. I imagine that 80% of our foods are imported from other regions of Nigeria and abroad. We do not produce a single food item in commercial quantity that could support a factory for export, thereby creating jobs. ***Therefore we suggest that a significant part of the security vote be spent on agricultural research to boost our food production and increase the availability of raw materials that can be used in commercial manufacturing.*** Our people do not yet realize that every new thing from abroad that they buy and become accustomed to today was developed through years of research in those countries. So even if there are businesses that could afford to spend money on research, it is not going to happen. After all not all research lead to successful outcomes. So the government MUST STEP IN to develop the culture of sponsoring research in our institutions of higher learning.

Akwa Ibom does not have a large land mass. Consequently we must apply technology to maximize our food production. Two things we eat a lot are fish and vegetables. Aquaponics lets us produce both in a small space by using fish waste to fertilize the vegetables grown in water. One can apply a little solar powered pump to circulate the water between the fish and vegetable tanks.

The government should do an inventory of what we have. The government must comb through what little residual forests that we have left and document the species that live there now. Efforts should be made to re-introduce extinct animals like Enin, Isantim etc. into our habitat. For example, we will not have to import bony cows from the north if we can raise our own fat Enang Ibibio (Angus beef), which we have. The places where we raise these Enang Ibibio must be adequately protected because the people supplying cows today will not sit idly by to see a formidable competitor enter the business

The ocean off our shore should be mapped to determine the fish species we have, their population monitored and the health of the ocean monitored so we can take steps to address any issues that adversely affect the ocean. We must not wait for Nigeria to awaken to this responsibility. We did not wait for them to realize the value of higher education in 1928 when we taxed ourselves to send our children overseas to study disciplines thought critical to our successful future.

The government should set up a boat finance scheme for the young unemployed men in the coastal communities who would become fishermen. It must be stressed from the onset that any loan obtained for the purchase of a fishing vessel **MUST** be **REPAID** and can never be ridden off as a dividend of democracy. In fact, a course should be organized to teach prospective fishermen the business of the fishing industry. This is how to empower our people to secure their future. We are more secure when we are self - reliant. We make ourselves insecure when foreigners own most of the fishing vessels and our young men are only employees.

We should continue to encourage farmers to plant high yield palm trees (from Malaysia). This project was quite visible during Obong Attah's tenure but I have since not seen any emphasis on it.

The world climate is changing (believe it or not). The government should build a safe storage house of seeds of our staple foods so that in the event of a catastrophe, we can have a way of re-starting our agriculture. Other people have realized this and have built a storehouse for their seeds. If something happened, their first priority would be to their people, not everyone else.

Government should make fast yielding cassava stems easily obtainable by farmers so we can up our production. The government **NEEDS** to inform the people that such cassava stems exist, show them the benefits and where they can buy such stems.

We must stop making asinine decisions like splitting the campus of Akwa Ibom University into many sites thereby raising the cost of security and maintenance to the power of the number of campuses. By that I mean that if you split the University to three campuses, your

cost securing all three is the same as the cost securing one site raised to the power three, not just multiplied by three. So we must return to the original sensible plan of all departments on one campus. A school of agriculture could be sited at a different location so that enough land can be allocated for research.

We must begin to think of future generations and do our research ourselves. This function cannot be left to foreigners.

Ikpafak N. H. Ibanga, July 26, 2017