

THE TRANSFORMATION AGENDA AND INCREASING ROLE OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSION IN NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

Various measures and strategies have been adopted by different governments in order to harness the natural resources to the betterment of her citizenry. But President Jonathan's economy policy is quite different in that there is a generational shift from oil to knowledge-based economy and this requires the application of the new knowledge to drive other soft sectors; governance, entertainments, public service, media sector etc. This involves the development of a vibrant ICT sector to drive and expand the national production frontier in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. Secretaries work for businesses representing virtually every industry and economic sector, they are critical in the economy of the country, therefore, this paper looked into the increasing role of secretaries in nation building and the transformation agenda. The paper focuses on the workplace skills and technological integrations in nation building and ICT and secretarial entrepreneurship in nation building. The paper recommends that government should deploy and ensure full utilization of ICT infrastructure on all fronts.

Keywords: *ICT, Transformation Agenda, Skills, Secretaries' Nation building, National development.*

Introduction

On assumption of office on May 29, 2011, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan met a nation with vital infrastructures such as roads, power, water, etc in camotose state, while key sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, education and transportation were floundering. It was against this background that the President unveiled a Transformation agenda which he hoped would put back the economy on track. The agenda was to be the platform on which his administration would spring off.

The Transformation Agenda

Nigeria is not new to having its leaders come up with a number of visions and policies since independence. For instance, President Shehu Shagari had his Green Revolution and Austerity measures. Buhari/Idiagbon had War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Babangida came with Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). General Sani Abacha's Economic package remained amorphous except he succeeded in stabilizing the exchange rate during his regime, President Olusegun Obasanjo's economic policy included privatization, monetization, consolidation among others and the late President Musa Umaru Ya'Adua seven-point Agenda.

President Jonathan's 5-years development plan 2011-2015 differs from others based on its being a well-thought-out policy document backed by a word-class team of technocrats under his chairmanship and the coordination of the renowned economist, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Gyong, 2013)

The Transformation Agenda arose out of the need to correct the flaws in the country's drive for development where there is absence of long-term perspective and lack of continuity, consistency, commitment (3cs) to agreed policies. The culminating effect of these has been growth and development of the Nigeria economy without concomitant improvements in the overall welfare of Nigerian citizens. According to the information contained in the enabling document, the Transformation Agenda is based on and draws inspiration from the vision 20:2020 and the first National Implementation Plan (NIP) aims to deepen the effects and provide a sense of direction.

The Transformation Agenda is based on a set of priority policies and programmes which when implanted would transform the Nigerian economy to meet the future needs of the people. Implicit in its DNA is the determination of the Jonathan administration to diversify the economy away from oil, and make sure that the external sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, solid minerals and services are vibrant and thriving.

One of the key objectives of President Jonathan's transformation Agenda is the area of encouraging large-scale industries and small and medium enterprises (SMES) to manufacture goods, revitalize ailing industries, promote agriculture and agro-businesses, encourage local content strategy and develop information communication technology (ICT) to be the driver of the economy.

In summary, Peple (2013) pinned that Transformation Agenda seeks to overhaul the country and launch it on the path of prosperity and will form the critical mass which critics will use to judge his performance in office.

Information Communication Technology And Transformation Agenda

The potentials of information technology as a catalyst of development is substantial in Nigeria, and like most developing nations around the world, has come

to recognise the importance of ICT as a fundamental driver of productivity and growth. This recognition is well captured on the National Development Plan – Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 (Adebisi, 2013)

Maku (2013) said, ICT remains pivot in the attainment of the nation's economic development agenda, vision 20:2020. He added that the earlier the people recognize and key into the generational shift from oil to knowledge based economy, the better the chances of realising the economic transformation initiative of the country. Shamsuddeen reiterated that ICT has a prime place in the transformation agenda currently by President Goodluck Jonathan. He further said it was in realization of the critical role of ICT in nation building that the present administration created the ministry of communication and Technology to enable tap the enormous ICT potentials that abound in the country for the overall benefit of the people and the nation as a whole.

The increasing globalization driven by ICT makes it imperative for Nigeria as an emerging market to irreversibly consider the application and promotion of ICT strategy to facilitate its rapid growth and development. This will involve the development of a vibrant ICT sector to drive and expand the national production frontiers in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. It would also require the application of the new knowledge to drive other soft sectors; governance, entertainments, public services, media sector, tourism etc.

In the light of the above, this paper would be tailored to small and medium enterprises (SMES) and Information Communication Technology as it relates to secretarial profession in nation building.

The Evolution Of A Secretary

The Secretarial role has dramatically changed. Gone are the days of being the messenger and supervisor of tasks. The role of a secretary in the past involved assisting managers and executives with clerical and secretarial tasks and in smaller businesses they also undertook reception duties. But the days when shorthand and typing speed were the main challenges are long gone.

The modern secretary has acquired growing responsibilities over the last five years that reflect the changing workplace. Now they are expected to master skills ranging from high-tech-office equipment, complex software, purchasing and communication. These trends are pushing businesses to continually expand the role of a secretary.

Today's secretary must think and act like aligned firmly within the management team, yet to be approachable to hear ideas and suggestions of subordinates. Gathering information, creating solutions, presenting and implementing action plans are skills that a secretary must demonstrate.

The value of the secretary is their ideas that save costs, increase profits, help customers directly or motivates employees to increase company profits.

Skills Needed By Secretary For Better Performance In Transformation Agenda

As competition increases on a global basis, companies are regularly asked to do with more or less educated secretaries. Educated and talented secretaries are critical to the success of their organisation. And because secretaries work for businesses representing virtually every industry and economic sector, they are critical in the economy of the country. Duties performed by secretaries differs very little, regardless of the business being conducted by the office: below are categories of the duties of a secretary as outlined by Obadailki (2004)

- 1) Administrative Services:** This can include managing the receptionist function, planning meetings and conferences, managing transportation and travel, managing mail processing, coordinating office parties and administering business continuity programmes such as business insurance, liability insurance etc.
- 2. Facilities, Equipment and supplies:** This can include office space costing and leasing, office moves and relocation, signage, interior design and décor, overseeing cleaning, maintenance and repairs, arranging for office equipment and supplies, and arranging for commercial printing.
- 3 Information Technology:** This can include the use of desktop software (word-processing, e-mail, spreadsheets and presentation); use of database systems, administering a file server and local area network, data and system security, system monitoring and reporting, digital graphics and design and publishing and even view editing and streaming, and because communication systems are increasingly technologically advancing, it is now logical and more common for the following duties to be included in the information technology group, communication systems, cell phones, 2-way radios, broadband internet access and document collaboration systems); document imaging; and record management/organization, retention, storage, retrieval, disposal and security).
- 4 Management:** This can include applying principles and functions of management (planning, organizing, leading, controlling) documenting the management organization and chain of command and establishing office etiquette and business ethics guidelines.
- 5 Communication:** This can also include writing letters and reports, establishing phones procedures; formatting and proof-reading documents; using paper and electronic forms; putting together a corporate style manual and making presentations.

Skills: Obadailki (2004) outlined the skills required to accomplish the duties of a secretary grouped into three categories:

- 1) Conceptual skills
- 2) People skills
- 3) Technical skills

Conceptual Skills: This includes the ability to analyse problems and come up with solutions and to identify potential problems and prevent them. This also includes the ability to work without close supervision, be detail oriented, demonstrate sound reasoning and judgment; and have the ability to make decisions and it includes the ability to see the organisation as a whole and understand how a change to one part of the organization could impact the other parts, anticipating the impact of decisions.

People Skills: (Sometimes referred to as “Soft skills”) These enable one to work with others. They include good oral and written communication ability, to read people, work with different people, and to be fair and firm. They also include the ability to listen and give others the opportunity to provide input and other meaningful suggestions. These skills are particularly important for a secretary because they are the liaison between company executives and all kinds of other employees, from professional, technical and managerial staff to clerk and blue collar workers.

Technical Skills: includes the ability to use computer technology. They also include specialized knowledge and abilities in numerous areas such as communication system, records management, finance, human resources, facilities, commercial printing, mail processing, and business insurance to name a few. The ability to coordinate several activities at once, set priorities, and establish and meet deadlines are other technical examples of technical skills. This category also includes a sound understanding of business law, various federal and local laws, and how to comply with those legal requirements. Technical skills are also particularly important for a secretary because they are usually the only person in the organisation responsible for these areas.

Traits: Secretaries must be able to handle variety of tasks, situations and personalities; they must be able to handle private company information and private personnel information and they must be prepared to handle stressful situations that occur in office. So, what traits make for a great secretary; here are a few keywords.

- Organized
- Detail oriented
- Analytical
- Trustworthy

- Fair
- Firm
- Receptive
- Persevering
- Confident
- Flexible, etc.

The Work Place Skill And Technology Intergration In Nation Building

Technological proficiency is essential for most business positions in the modern work climate. Internet-based faxing, laser printers, networked computers and advanced phone systems are common devices in business of all sizes. Integrating technology into workplace offers productivity enhancements essential to remain competitive.

Changing work practices have increased demands for information technology (IT) skills. Many employers want experience in desktop publishing, spreadsheet and internet skills, in addition to the traditional areas of office management, word processing and databases. Employers still need a skilled labour force to operate this automated equipment (Iyons, 2012). These skilled labour forces are found in secretarial profession and below are how they manipulate this equipment contributing to nation building.

Communication: - Accurate and timely communication is of fundamental important to all organizations. Because of the speed and all pervasive nature of ICT, modern communication is almost entirely electronically based whether within the same organization or more widely to suppliers customers, government department or to the general public. Secretaries make use of this huge and ever increasing range of possibilities including faxes, e-mail, voice mail, mobile telephones, radio, electronics display, video conferencing, computer-to-computer transfers etc of growing importance is the use of local, national and worldwide network for transmitting and receiving all types of information which aid in decision making.

Desktop publishing:- In the world of sawy business, government and business need a way to advertise their wares and services in an eye catching and thought provoking manner. Desktop publishing plays a enormous role in crafting catchy advertisements, business cards, banners, billboard and more going beyond the capabilities of the more plain text centric world processor.

Secretaries with the help of desktop publishing packages such as Microsoft publishers, Adobe page makers, Quarkx press, Corel venture, Serifs page plus to produce frequently used documents such as reports, newsletters, business cards, mailers, flyers, ads, greeting cards and brochures with the help of service bureaus, they also can produce large size materials. Secretaries' accelerate the dissemination of diverse information because of the low-cost of production and also help to save

money and time which is an essential ingredient in nation building.

Data processing:- Government works with data and data are fact obtained by reading, observation, counting, measuring, both external and internal source and are captured by Secretaries electronically using spreadsheet packages. One of the important tasks of government is budgeting; secretaries use spreadsheet in exploring the effect on a budget of different values and assumptions so that the government can make effective decisions. The budget could also show in both an abbreviated and detailed format and could also be displayed in a graphic form.

Internet:- Webster defines internet as an electronic communication network that connects computer networks and organization computer facilities around the world. Everywhere in the world, business companies are constantly looking for effective ways to save money either by using their existing resource to be more productive or by cutting down costs, but without possibly any services that they rely on.

Most business companies of today are pretty much depending on the internet and broadband services to market their business online to worldwide customers, website hosting and telecommunication. Secretaries use the following internet facilities to buttress national development.

E-mail:- A scanned document such as signed contracts and time sheet can be sent in a DDP form, e-mail is also used to schedule meetings, conferences, training and sessions etc.

Facebook and Twitter:- Are social networks which a secretary can use to share useful article and have presentation and valuable resources that interest customers. Question asked on Twitter can be responded to in detail in a blog post and link to it from Facebook. This goes a long way to erase doubt about government policies and goes a long way to better understanding of government policies. A fan page can also be linked by secretary to a company sites, newsletter subscription, information and newsletter archives (Evans, 2009).

Online shopping: - This is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly buy goods or services from sellers over the internet using a web browser. The online shoppers commonly use a credit card or a pay pal account in order to make payment.

Secretaries have a broader selection, competitive pricing and a greater access to information. Online shopping is of much lower-cost compared to bricks and mortar store and also increases customer rule and builds sustainable capabilities.

E-banking: - This refers to the use of a bank's website to oversee accounts and make

transactions. Funds can be transferred from one account to another within seconds. Cashed checks can be reviewed as photo files (reference.com.Do13).

Secretaries can use e-banking to view balances, pays, transfer funds, set up recurring bill payment or transfers, view CIBC VISA accounts, order cheques etc. The e-banking has eliminated wait in line, plan your day around the bank etc. In short, a secretary becomes more productive as her time is better utilized.

Hotel and Travel Reservation: - Gone are the days when a secretary makes trips to the local travel agency to reserve air fares or book a hotel for the boss. A secretary can book a air fare and reserve a hotel via internet which both saves time and money. A secretary can also change and cancel online reservation at any time (Olakley, 2003).

Information And Communication Technology And Secretarial Entrepreneurship For National Development

Entrepreneurship is an important facet of industrial growth and development of a nation. It is the backbone of a nation that sets its eyes on maximizing its performance in every filed. Sachs (2005) in Oyemah (2011) affirmed that the spirit of entrepreneurship brings about enthusiasm, persistence and the ability to seek entrepreneurship opportunities that lead to success. A nation's ability to generate a steady-stream of business opportunities can only come about when its people take to entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurs are essentially the engines of growth for nation. Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economics development through creation of utilities and generation of employment within a short period. It has been accepted that entrepreneurship is an economic venture by which the people can be charged to move upwards within a short period of time especially from the point of economic generation.

Onmuoja (2009) in Oyemah (2011) opined that entrepreneurship skill prepares an individual for self employment as it called. Entrepreneurship is a creative and innovative response to the environment. Onmuajo (2009) is of the view that entrepreneurship develops the human capital resource and expresses the human capital to avoid range of activities and opportunities that is available in his environment.

The secretarial profession is one of the fields of vocational studies that lead to the development of the individual as well as the nation at large. It is a profession that is geared towards skills acquisition expertise Okonronkwo (2009). It makes the individual self reliant; it creates job opportunities for them and others too. More so, secretarial training enables the individual to be exposed to knowledge about the business field.

The following are some of the ways secretaries are involved in entrepreneurial developments.

- 1. Establishment of cybercafés:-** a cybercafé is a commercial avenue where members of the public can access the net for a fee, usually per hour or

minute. Some cafes offer unmetered wireless access. The venue will generally offer beverages, food and other services such as binding. Secretaries establish cybercafés with most of these services and hereby creating employment to others and also generating income.

2. **Internet kiosks:** - In information technology, a kiosk is a small physical structure, (often including a computer and display screen) that displays information for people walking by. Kiosks are common near the entrances of shopping malls, trade fairs and at professional conference. In Nigeria, internet kiosk involves a laptop, a printer with scanning facilities where people do registration of SIM cards, JAMB, WAEC and any other online registration.
3. **Phone booths:-** Secretaries operates a phone booths or call centres where calls can be made through mobile phones or cell-phones. Scratch cards are also sold here.
4. **Making Of Scratch Cards:-** Prepaid scratch cards are of high demand because of cell phones. What one needs is scratch/prepaid card labelling machine, Hydographies water, transfer, etc, secretaries are also involved in scratch card making.
5. **Sales Of Phones And Accessories:** - Secretaries are into the business of selling phones, mobile phones and indispensable devices and are other essential parts of our everyday life, yet critical to and supporting modern fast paced networked/connected digital lifestyle.

Conclusion

The transformation agenda is a welcomed one but the questions is how many government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) have functional websites? How may MDAs employ online businesses as it relates to services delivery to the general public; as of today only few government establishments can boast of having a working ICT structure. Secretarial profession is ICT-based needed by all citizens in order to effectively manage their personal business and economic systems to ensure continuous earning of reasonable income; and is fervently involved as an important part of the foundation of the nation's economy.

Recommendations

Nigeria needs to leverage its investment in ICT to a significant competitive advantage in the rapidly changing global economy. As a way forward, the following should be put in place;

1. Ministry of Communication Technology (MCT) should push for creation of functional IT (or ICT) departments in government institutions as this would help provide interface necessary for effective implementation of policies aimed at maximizing the leveraging potential of ICT for national development.
2. Government should provide security, expand national physical infrastructure

such as power and broadband, encourage private sector investment in the ICT industry, deploy and ensure full utilization of ICT infrastructure on all fronts- education, health, agriculture, oil and gas etc.

3. There is need to align the public service IT-wise with private sector to allow for a smooth translation to a vibrant digital economy.
4. Secretaries should be encouraged to make creative use of ICT towards sustainable socio-economic development.
5. To achieve a vibrant and competitive private sector led economy, government should reduce the bottleneck witnessed at Corporate Affairs Commission for business registration and ensure registration of new firms within a month.
6. And also streamline the conditions for loan assessment; not demanding for outrageous high collateral like landed properties and certificates of occupancy (C of O).

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