

Policy Recommendations for North West Regional Development in Nigeria

The North West zone of Nigeria needs a regional integration framework that goes beyond agriculture and incorporates all other sectors of the regional economy. This framework must be focused on exploiting avenues that exist to promote food security using agriculture, but at the same time look to more substantial sources of revenue that will enable the region take care of the multiplicity of problems already identified for its growth and development.

The Voice to the People (V2P) research on the regional development in the North West geopolitical zone of Nigeria showed that one of the most significant obstacles to achieving sustainable economic and social development in the region is the lack of a comprehensive plan for growth and development. Given the specific challenges related to this, it is therefore crucial that any such regional plan must be based on the experiences of others regions in the country.

Recommendations

- The peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region is crucial to the success of any plan for economic and social development.
- The private sector and Civil Society Organizations should be involved in the integration process, however, it should not be expected that all private sector groups will favour regional integration.
- Given the disparities in economic weight that exists between member states, new policy instruments to deal with the fears of economic polarization must be found. Examples of this include multispeed arrangements, compensation schemes, regional investment banks, or structural solidarity funds.
- Dispute settlement mechanisms need to be strengthened and ways to ensure policy credibility must be put in place. Investors need to have confidence that integration measures will not be reversed and that barriers to regional markets will not be re-instituted overnight.
- The regional integration framework must institute a standard mechanism for accountability. Integration can only take place where there exist upright leaders who are accountable to the people. The region must feel as must institute such mechanisms to be able to manage the huge human and agricultural potentials as well as natural resources.

- Development decisions must involve the people. It is when the people are involved in decisions affecting them, that their need can be met. Regional challenges came from within and thus it is the people that own the entire development process. The region can develop further if governments enable a qualitative improvement in their citizens' life. This means that a suitable business climate that facilitates better production and more trade and investment must be established.
- For the North West Regional Commission to be effective, it must be unbundled from the clutches of the governors. It must not be political. It must be neutral in the affairs of member states though a benchmark of good governance must be set. It should be managed by tested and patriotic professionals and technocrats drawn from the member states who may earn token wages if they earn at all. It must be accountable. Above all, the welfare of the people in the zone should be of paramount interest to the Commission.
- The North West Regional Commission must avoid the pitfalls of the BRACED commission as listed in section 3.4.1 the 'Regional development in the North West geopolitical zone of Nigeria' report.

Above all, there is the need to understand that successful regional integration requires its own budget for short, medium and long term planning and execution of projects. This must be agreed and the ratio of contribution from various member states agreed with an independent tested and patriotic professionals and technocrats drawn from the member states to oversee the affairs of the regional commission.
