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Tackling the Challenges of Contemporary Social Change in Nigeria in a Globalized World

**Fidelis Ngaji Akwaji; Christiana Chibuzo Uwanada & Joy Enang Usang**

Department of Sociology  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Calabar  
Calabar - Nigeria

Correspondence Author: akwadelis@gmail.com

**Abstract**

One thing that has remained constant in life is change. More than ever before, human society is undergoing unprecedented social change historically. Propelling this rapid social change is advances in science and technology especially in the areas of information and communication technology (ICT). The social phenomenon of globalization is the outcome of social engineering driven by ICT. This has continued to yield both positive and negative effects globally. Both developed and developing societies are caught in the globalization fever. Unequal integration into the world system has continued to deepen the gap of inequality between societies. While the developed countries and other emerging economies operate at the core of the world system, the less developed ones participate at the periphery. This paper is essentially a sociological discourse intended to contribute to the academic debate on the social problems facing Nigeria today. Using desk research techniques involving a review of secondary resources such as journal articles, newspapers, books etc. Findings revealed debasement of our cultural value, security challenges, and lack of penetration in ICT among others as the bane of Nigeria's integration into the world system. The study recommends investment in ICT, tackling security challenges, cultural reorientation etc.

**Keywords:** Social Change, Globalization, World System, Dependency, Challenge.

**Introduction**

Change is undoubtedly constant and universal. Sociologists describe social change as fundamental alterations in society's cultural patterns, social structure, social organization, and institutions (Hughes & Kroehler, 2008; Tischler, Whitten & Hunter, 1986). There are both positive and negative effects of social change. Infrastructural development, industrialization, technology, and human resources development, to mention a few, are indices of social change. Considering her huge endowment in natural and human resources, Nigeria's performance in terms of these elements of social change since her independence in 1960 is dismal compared with the milestone of other developing nations such as India, South Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. Although it leads to visible progress, the attendant challenges emanating from social change in Nigeria are enormous and should be dealt with accordingly. The country's long colonial history and unique structure as a multi-ethnic entity compounds the peculiarity of her social change challenges. Geopolitical zones; uneven spread of development programs, policy inconsistency, increasing inequality (in gender and material wealth), moral decadence, high rate of crime, youth unemployment, etc., are some of the challenges Nigeria has to tackle in the face of social change.

Like any other society, social change in Nigeria is occasioned by both internal and external factors such as cultural diffusion, ideology, and technological innovation. Technological innovation is a factor that has impacted unprecedented change in human society via information and communication technology (ICT). ICT is the key driver of

globalization. Indeed, every human society is grappling with this social phenomenon with some societies more advanced than others in the level of change. The aspect of ICT that is trending in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an explosion in electronic transactions particularly in e-commerce. While many developed and developing countries of the world are boosting their economy via e-commerce, Nigeria is still lagging. With a population of about 170 million, less than 30 per cent use the Internet compared to China where more than 380 million people use the Internet (Nwagbara, 2015). Chinese entrepreneurs have taken advantage of their country's large population and have also penetrated the Nigerian market. Militating factors such as paucity of infrastructure, high level of illiteracy, poverty, insecurity, etc., have to be addressed to enable Nigeria to join the comity of nations in an ICT-driven world economy. The need to address these ills is more rational in the face of dwindling revenue from crude oil. In fact, with technological innovations, many societies are increasingly working their way to the core of the world economic system. Where is Nigeria in the picture?

### **Concept of Globalization**

Several scholars across the globe have presented divergent views on the concept of globalization. According to Iyayi (2004) as cited in Adesina (2012) globalization has been used rather loosely to stand for a variety of things, the shrinking of the world into a global village, the awesome changes brought about or mandated by the revolution in Information Communication Technology (ICT), the collapse of boundaries between different worlds, expanding connectivity of all forms of interaction. Giddens (1990) defines globalization as an intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away. It is also the process of social homogenization by which the experience of everyday life, marked by the diffusion of commodities and ideas can foster a standardization of cultural expression around the world (Schamllleger, 2001). It is a social process in which the constraints of geography on economics, political, social, and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly (Waters, 2001). Schotte (1997) argues that globalization facilitates the removal of barriers among nations of the world, thereby giving social relations unhindered access. The unique characteristics of globalization often increased capital mobility, and decline in the cost of transportation, computing, and communications. It is also seen as the growing interdependence of countries- economically, politically, culturally, socially- worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of interacting capital flows as well as through the main rapid and widespread diffusion of technology. For Tomlinson (1999) globalization is a complex process because it involves rapid social change that occurs simultaneously across several dimensions in the world economy, politics, communication, and the physical environment and in each culture and each of these transformations interact with each other.

According to Ritzer (2008), globalization can be analyzed culturally, economically, politically, and institutionally. For each type of analysis, a key difference is whether one sees increasing homogeneity or heterogeneity. At the extremes, the globalization of culture can be seen either as a process of transnational expansion of common codes and practices (homogeneity) or as a process in which many global and local cultural inputs interact to create a kind of pastiche, or a blend leading to a variety of cultural hybrids (heterogeneity). He states further that the trend toward homogeneity is often associated with cultural imperialism, the influence of particular culture, or a wide range of other cultures. Aina (1999) argues that globalization entails universalization whereby the object, practices, or even values transcend geopolitical boundaries, penetrating the hitherto sovereign nation-state and impacting the orientation and value system of the people. In a broader perspective, he posits that globalization depicts the transformation of the relationship between states, institutions, groups, and individuals, the universalization of certain practices, identities, and structures,

and perhaps, more significantly, the expression of the global restructuring that has accrued in recent decades in the structure of modern capitalist relation (Aina, 1999). According to Adesina (2012), industrialized countries are essentially entrenching a global capitalist system and consumer culture by establishing a global market controlled by the most dominant interests within the ruling elites of these multinational companies.

Every society on Earth is integrated into the globalized universe. None can wriggle out of the web; rather each tries to make the best of it. Industrialized countries of Europe, North America, and Asia are currently blazing the trail in this network (Nwagbara, 2015). Their technological advances and huge industrial development distinguish them from others and enable them to set the tone of ongoing economic and social change. Nigeria's vulnerability in the whole process is obvious. It has become a dumping ground for the goods and services of the key players. This translates to huge job creation for the youth of these industrialized countries and deepens the spate of unemployment for the teeming youth in Nigeria. The root cause of the increased rate of poverty in Nigeria is globalization (Nwagbara, 2003). To worsen the situation is an accelerated influx of alien cultures on the country's soil. This has attendant vices such as the erosion of cherished cultural values, pornography, and cybercrime, to mention a few.

### **Nigeria in the World System**

No doubt, what sets societies apart from each other is their level of participation in this world system. Paramount to any rigorous analysis of social engineering is the comprehension of how and why the world system plays out, a condition that has been vividly described by Immanuel Wallerstein. Wallerstein (1974, 1980) described an arrangement of differentiation between the core and the periphery within the world economy in which the "core regions consist of geographical areas that dominate the world economy and exploit the rest of the system while the periphery regions consist of areas that provide raw materials to the core and are exploited by it" (Hughes & Kroeler, 2008, p.304). Nigeria was integrated into the world economic system by the British colonial government. This arrangement between Britain (core) and Nigeria (periphery) ensured that the periphery supplied raw materials at a very cheap rate to the industries in the core which refine the raw materials into finished products and sold them to the periphery at a more exorbitant rate. The colonial situation further widened the gap of gender inequality in Nigeria (Nwagbara, 2010). This dependency relationship continued even after independence in 1960. As Toyo (2007:1) observed, "Globalization continues the story in the world history of West European mercantilism and expansionism". The negative effects of this relationship can hardly be overemphasized as the country is progressively plunged into the vicious circle of poverty. In this era of technological advancement, Nigeria is yet to make a significant stride. There is a need to tackle the numerous challenges that form a blockade in the development stride.

### **The Challenge of Social Change in Nigeria in the Contemporary Global System**

It is glaring to both young and old that Nigeria is passing through a trying moment in the present dispensation. Apart from general insecurity of life and property due to insurgency, the country lacks the wherewithal to pierce into the centre of the world system. Some of the common challenges confronting the country are highlighted below.

#### **The Debasement of Cultural Values**

In Nigeria, the traditional value systems have been relegated in favour of vices that include getting rich quickly, drug abuse, financial and internet crimes, cult activities, and in some cases homosexuality. Some decades ago, all these behaviours are considered odd to the traditional value systems and are generally detested. This is done through the use of Western media which profess the Western attitude to life as the original and modern that influences

the youths especially. This facilitated the development of behaviours that lack the influence of normative moral values traditionally integrated into the behaviour of youths through strong parental influence. Nigeria as a nation is engulfed in corruption and has become a national issue. Corruption undermines economic development, threatens state security, and influences democratic values. Today in Nigeria, material wealth has become the major yardstick for measuring success with people having little or no concern for how they were acquired, an aberration to the traditional cherished values.

### **Lack of Penetration in ICT in Nigeria**

There is a raging debate in the world on the mixed record of the information technology revolution, and of globalization, especially when we consider their social dimensions on a planetary scale. Castells (1999) assert that as is always the case with a fundamental debate, it is most often framed ideologically and cast in simplistic terms. For the advocates of technology, for the true believers in the magic of the market, everything will be just fine, as long as ingenuity and competition are set free. All we need are a few regulatory fixes, to prevent corruption and to remove bureaucratic impediments in the path of our flight to hyper-modernity. For those in Nigeria who are not ecstatic about surfing on the Internet, but who are affected by layoffs, lack of basic social services, crime, poverty, and disruption of their lives, globalization is nothing more than a warmed-up version of traditional capitalist ideology. In their view, information technology is a tool for renewed exploitation, destruction of jobs, environmental degradation, and the invasion of privacy. Many Nigerians are yet to have access to the internet, either as a result of poverty or lack of awareness of the opportunities it presents.

### **Poverty**

The greatest concern about globalization expressed by Awake (2002) as cited in Yusuf (2003) is the ever-increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. It is observed that while global wealth has increased, it has become concentrated in the hands of a few privileged individuals and a few countries. According to Awake (2002), the net worth of the 200 richest people on Earth now exceeds the combined income of 40 per cent of the people who live on the planet 2 – 4 billion people. It continues further that while wages continue to rise in wealthy countries, 80 impoverished countries have seen a decline in average income over the past ten years. Nigeria is among these eighty countries. The poverty level in Nigeria has remained intractable despite policies and programs toward its reduction (Nwagbara, Essia & Ering, 2006; The distribution of global wealth has never been fair. But economic globalization has widened the gap between rich and poor nations.

However, some developing countries, as observed by Salimono (1999), have benefited from their integration into the global economy. For example, India and Asia as a whole have seen improvement. He noted that only 15 per cent of the East Asian population lives on \$1 a day compared with 27 per cent ten years earlier. However, the story is different in Africa and particularly Nigeria where income has decreased community allows nearly three billion people-almost half of all humanity-to subsist on \$2 or less per day in a world of unprecedented wealth. Such gross unfairness in the global neighbourhood clearly shows many seeds of unrest and frustration. The poor people of this country face a paradox of having so many alleviating programmes to lessen the effect of poverty that is ravaging them and at the same time having to cope with the incessant increase in the price of petroleum products which has a multiplier effect on other goods and services. No doubt, this environment hinders people's access to the potentials social change present.

### **Unemployment**

The social effect of globalization is another fear entertained by Dani (1997), when he states that since globalization is associated with instability of output and employment, the effects among other things job security. The majority of the people in Nigeria derived their income from labour in Nigeria anything that affects their job is socially disrupted and thus

brings tension to the fabric of the society. Many organizations, especially banks have laid off their staffs as witnessed in Nigeria recently occasioned by social change in the system, which may create industrial conflicts.

### **Geopolitical zones**

The six geopolitical zones have not been entirely carved out based on geopolitical locations but rather states with similar cultures, ethnic groups, and common history were classified in the same zone. Nigeria is made up of approximately 400 ethnic groups and 450 languages (Oтите, 2002). The geopolitical structures are reflections of our complex structural realities in fashioning out the best unit of political participation in the democratic process. Yet they form ethnic alliances or blocs of big brothers to control the democratic process informally behind the scenes. As expressed by Agbor (2012), the whole issue of ethnicity in Nigeria has become a thorough concern of most scholars especially as it pertains to the unity and progress of the Nigerian society. Most people have attributed the economic, social, and political disorganization of Nigeria to the unnecessary and parochial reliance of almost the entire population and especially the Nigerian leadership on ethnicity as a guiding tool in governance and action. The reliance on ethnicity has over the years presented unnecessary favouritism of the ethnic group in power and the social, political, and economic disregard of the ethnic groups outside the corridors of power.

Therefore, this establishes the fact that fairness and justice cannot be attained where ethnic consciousness is constantly professed and forms the covert basis for the distribution of societal wealth and resources. Because the ethnic issue becomes very pronounced, where resources for distribution are involved, the disfavored ethnic groups out of frustration and disillusionment began to lose hope in the entire system and cultivate either a systematic or a radical withdrawal of their love and pride for the country. The implication, therefore, is that there would be a reduction in the level of national identity. It would suffice to say that this inter-ethnic competition breeds conflict, especially in the context of prevailing economic recession; scarce resources are rigorously competed for by the various ethnic groups spread along geopolitical structures. Agbor (2012) argued that the selfish drives, therefore, by each ethnic group to limit competition to their advantage is expressed in the use of hostility toward the other ethnic group.

### **Security Challenges**

Security is a key responsibility of all governments, the fear of crime, violence, and anxiety is now a global phenomenon that cut across boundaries of class and social status. However, the nature of the threats varies from political or violent conflict to non-political or purely criminal violence. Insecurity has become the most topical issue of discourse in Nigeria today (Ushie, Akwaji & Ezekendu, 2015). Contemporary Nigerian society is engulfed by security challenges. National security is of utmost importance to the progress and development of any nation. As such no nation can afford to treat with levity any issue that threatens its national security. Nigeria is currently facing serious internal security threats, the most devastating and worrisome are the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, the Niger Delta militancy in the south-south, and kidnapping, and armed robbery in the south-east and south-south. Also, Jos' religious killing and the issue of herdsmen among others instilled psychological fear in the mind of most Nigerian. Additionally, there is insecurity posed by violent crimes, ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based conflicts, and election-induced violence. Although the cost of the prevailing insecurity in Nigeria is difficult to measure in monetary or real terms, however, it is clear to observers that it has cost Nigeria enormous human and material resources. Insecurity in Nigeria has affected the growth of the business that would have earned her foreign exchange. Attacks on individuals and businesses adversely affect business viability, economic stability, and in turn social prosperity. This situation has affected Nigeria from benefitting from the opportunities offered by

globalization due to poor security situation as many companies are relocating to neighbouring African countries.

### **Uneven Distribution of Opportunities**

Furthermore, it is observed that the unskilled and uneducated workers as well as the marginalized agrarian population benefit less than the people with sophisticated skills and high levels of education. Dani (1997) noted that highly educated people and people with sophisticated skills are better and more equipped to meet the challenges of the competitive world.

### **Cultural Diffusion**

One other area of globalization is that it tends to transmit the cultural pattern of developed countries to the rest of the world. For instance, Nigeria Youth have been culturally colonized. This is because they now imitate the European consumption patterns, modes of transport, and methods of communication including their music, without regard for the local culture (Yusuf, 2003). Though, it is noticed that this problem does not affect Nigerians only. It is a worldwide phenomenon. This trend would, eventually, lead to the homogenization of economic values, thereby eliminating or reducing the Nigerian economy to nothing.

### **Erosion of Sovereignty**

The specific impact of globalization on Nigeria was identified according to Oyejide (1998) in the political sphere, the most important consequence is the erosion of sovereignty, especially in economic and financial matters, as a result of the imposition of models, strategies, and policies of development on African countries by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade. Economically, globalization has, on the whole, reinforced the economic marginalization of Nigerian economies and their dependence on a few primary goods for which demand and prices are externally determined (Adesina, 2012). This has, in turn, accentuated poverty and economic inequality as well as the ability of the vast number of Nigerians to participate meaningfully in the social and political life of their country's indigenous development of technology and distorting patterns of production in Africa.

According to Salimono (1999), globalization has reduced barriers existing in international trade. The reduction in those barriers has opened the door for export-led growth. For instance, Phillips (1991) notes that the Nigerian economy has been mono-cultural since independence and has so much depended on Western countries for its survival. Bayo (2000) and Evbuomwan (1996) observed that in the 60s, Nigeria depended on agriculture for her revenue, which in turn, was used to provide life-sustaining goods for the citizen. Then, Nigeria and other less developed economies exported raw materials in the form of cash crops such as Cocoa, Coffee, palm-produced Groundnut, etc. The discovery of petroleum by Nigeria marked a turning point for Nigeria and by the turn of 1970, agriculture has been pushed to a distant background. Onwioduokit and Ashinze (1996) observed that it was in the 70s when Nigeria witnessed an oil boom that brought about a major shift from agriculture to petroleum. The bulk of the revenue of Nigeria now comes from petroleum. Since then, Nigeria has depended heavily on crude oil and this has caused instability in the economy due to fluctuations in the price of crude oil in the world market.

### **Tackling the challenge of social change in the world system in Nigeria: the way forward Investment in research and development (RD) in ICT**

Adequate funding of education and huge investment in RD in the area of ICT will salvage Nigeria from her peripheral status in the world system. The country is endowed with abundant natural and human resources that will drive the process.

### **Genuine Incentives for export**

Nigeria has depended heavily on crude oil and this has caused instability in the economy due to fluctuation in the price of crude oil in the world market as witnessed in

recent times. Oputa (1996) and Salimono (1999) state that since globalization entails trade liberalization, it is therefore imperative that there is a free and unrestricted movement of trade, finance, and investment across the international border. The advantage here is that globalization allows Nigeria to export and import goods, capital, and investments without restriction. It is probably because of this advantage that Salimono (1999) asserts that for small and medium-sized economies with limited internal markets, the possibilities of economic growth lie, to a large extent, in production oriented towards the international market. To buttress his point, he states, that the experience of the last three decades shows that countries like China, Chile, Ivory Coast, and Botswana have managed to grow at a very rapid seven per cent 7%, eight per cent 8% or more per year, have relied on strong export growth, with export expanding at a faster rate than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nigeria can and should borrow a leaf from these countries' experience.

### **The Need for National Identity**

It is not mincing words to say that a disunited and disorganized country hardly achieves progress. National identity precisely brings about national progress. Therefore, a country needs the love and support of its citizenry to survive. In most societies, weakness sets in when the citizens become apathetic toward their country. This indifference to national affairs retard progress and drags the nation backwards. Progress and development of a strong and virile nation can be seen only when the citizen shows strong love and commitment to their country. Such citizens should be ready and willing to sacrifice for their country. It is only when this is done that a country is sure to be moving towards a united, strong, and developing nation that can harness opportunities presented by globalization.

In international politics where states' national interest is held sacrosanct, stronger and more developed nations interested in exploiting the weakness of other nation-states have developed antics that discourage the citizens from loving and supporting their own countries. It is in recognition of these facts that most democratic nations attempt to promote in their constitution, the love of the country by providing for the welfare of the people, for it is only when the welfare of the people is promoted that they in turn fully identify with the country. It is sufficient to say here that Nigeria is richly endowed with both natural and human resources to propel her to higher economic, social, and political heights and to integrate into the world system. What prevented and is preventing this take-off has been spotted by many analysts to be Nigeria's weak national identity. Using Cuba for instance with a population of about 9 million people whose only economic resource is sugar cane has suddenly been recognized internationally as a medical power with one doctor available for 300 people as against Nigeria with one doctor to about 20,000 citizens. Illiteracy has been reduced to the barest minimum in Cuba whereas Nigeria still parades over 70 million illiterate citizens (Agbor, 2012). This giant stride in Cuban development was a result of Cuba's democracy which has united all her people in a common Cuban identity. Nigeria with her vast and enormous resources can do more than this if only the country is united.

### **Develop capacity to handle international and computer-based crime**

The African State and its forces of law and order were used to handle "traditional crimes". Adesina (2012) argues that with globalization there has been an increase in crimes (drugs, pornography, international corruption, etc.) that had been at a lower magnitude. In addition, progress in information technology has facilitated the emergence and growth of computer-based crimes, especially fraud. For this, the law enforcement agencies have not been well prepared. The increase in these crimes across borders makes the force of law and order look helpless, unhelpful, and incapable. This tends to erode the confidence of the public in the state, thus weakening further its legitimacy. The strong challenge posed by the powerful criminals on the state creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity in the

public, thus reducing the required confidence that would attract both local and foreign investment. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of the forces of law and order, especially in the areas of detecting and handling sophisticated crime. If this does not happen, sophisticated criminals will find ready-made comfortable hiding places in Nigeria. This will be a big security problem for the rest of the world as already witnessed with the current security situation in Nigeria.

### **Poverty Eradication**

As global actors pressurize African governments to open up more and more to maximize foreign investments and capital inflows, and as big multinationals and local enterprises utilize this environment to cater to their interests, the government is having less and less room to pay attention to the abject poverty amongst the poor and rich both in and between countries. The African State will have to be encouraged to pay more attention to the fate of its poor populace than to the fate of big global actors through deliberate programs to alleviate poverty in Nigeria.

### **Committed and genuine political will to fight corruption**

Fighting corruption forms the cardinal objective of the present administration in Nigeria. Corruption is a cancer worm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria. It has manifested in the collapse of the country's infrastructure, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, injustice, the standard of education, health facilities, etc. Therefore, fighting corruption should be geared toward rebuilding our value system, which is directly connected to national development. National development in Nigeria can only be achieved with a sincere fight against corruption. The leadership of the country must be courageous enough to lead the fight devoid of political, ethnic, and religious sentiments for it to be meaningful. Also, concerted efforts should be made to the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage. This could be done through the preservation of historical and archaeological sites, the preservation of our artefacts in museums, the building of new museums in states where they are nonexistent; organization of annual cultural festivals by communities such as the new yam festival, the Argugun fishing festival. The federal government should encourage the study of Nigerian languages in schools and colleges.

### **Peace and Stability**

To promote peace and stability in our social environment, an equitable economic system must be put in place. Mere majority votes and government by majority rule should not be all that our democracy is about. Our democracy should compel the rule by the majority to provide adequately for the needs and interests of the ethnic and other minorities. This demand enjoins economic programmes which aim at the industrialization of both the rural and urban areas, identifying, developing, and utilizing local materials for different types of industries in different parts of the country. Our political democracy must go side by side with economic democracy to entrench and sustain socio-political stability. In this connection, we can argue that the provision of roads, industries, electricity, etc is often rightly associated with the development of the people and the local ethnic group(s) concerned. This will provide a fertile ground for Nigeria to align itself with the wind of revolution blowing around the world.

### **Conclusion**

While it is correct to say that social change has both positive and negative impacts on the world, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century experience is enacted via the powerful medium of information and communication technologies. While we can point to a few benefits yet, Nigeria has a fair share of the ills of social change driven by globalization. There is a need to urgently and effectively address these challenges arising from social change. Without a doubt, globalization is an irreversible process. Nigeria has the potential to compete favourably with the countries at the core; what is needed is to work out inclusive modalities to achieve this. The country should adopt an inward-looking approach to develop strategies to surmount the nagging challenges. Men and women should be equally involved in the planning and

execution of development projects and programmes. This will bring sustainable development and bridge the gender gap.

There is a need for Nigerians to preserve their cultures in any way possible. It is a shame that many Nigerian children of this generation cannot speak their mother tongue or understand their culture. Nigerians need to exploit the process of globalization to promote their cultures. For example, the internet can be employed to propagate the country's culture rather than degrade the values and mores of the land. There could be a website where the youth could browse to learn proverbs and the rudiments of their cultures. The country should pursue infrastructural and industrial development vigorously. This will create jobs for a large number of unemployed youth and curb restiveness and militancy. There should be a genuine and sincere commitment to diversify to agriculture and other sources of revenue, instead of depending on crude oil which is already failing us.

No society can make meaningful progress amid conflict. The country should resolve all the debilitating conflicts amicably. The interest of the country should be paramount in the minds of all Nigerians. Fairness and equity should be the watchword of the political leadership.

Finally, the country has abundant human and natural resources to reposition itself from the status of the periphery to that of the core of the world system. The political leadership needs to say 'Yes we can' by putting appropriate strategies in place to address the above challenges.

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