

DIPLOMATIC SHUTTLES IN FOREIGN POLICY: WERE OBASANJO TRIPS DURING HIS TENURE OF ANY BENEFITS TO NIGERIA?

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Abstract

A major foreign policy feature of the President Olusegun Obasanjo's 1999-2007 administration was its flurry of foreign trips. As a tool for promoting bilateral and multilateral bargaining in interstate relations, and against the cacophony of views on the relevance of these travels for a developing economy in transition, this paper presents a post-mortem historical discourse on the President Obasanjo's diplomatic travels and assesses the gains for Nigeria as a nation-state. It uses mainly secondary data to buttress the argument of success of Obasanjo's foreign travels which were aimed primarily at restoring Nigeria's international image hitherto battered by the military regimes that preceded the administration. It observes amongst other things that the shuttles rekindled international business engagement in Nigeria by attracting inflows of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), securing international debt reliefs while restoring its recognition in the comity of nations. It recommends among other things, a redirection of the nation-state's foreign policy towards addressing the critical developmental questions notably its near-zero domestic infrastructure, its drowning currency and its dire domestic/regional security situation being currently despoiled by scourges of regional terrorism and militant insurgencies.

Keywords: Foreign policy, diplomacy, diplomatic shuttles, Nigeria image-laundering, foreign direct investment (FDI)

Introduction.

The ascension to power and inauguration in May 1999 of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as elected President of Nigeria marked a watershed in the nation-state's international image rating. Since independence in 1960, the Nigerian State had been enmeshed in long years of military rule leading to an apparent plummet of its international image—a phenomenon which reached its lowest point bringing Nigeria to the fringes of a Pariah State at the brinks of democratic governance in 1999. Nigerians would prefer to forget the events of the Abacha regime (described briefly herein) which

inflicted gratuitous and wanton pains on them and forced many citizens to seek asylum abroad with those unable to travel forming various coalition movements in opposition to the draconic junta. Being a Nigerian citizen under the Abacha regime was burdensome as many became objects of ridicule at international forums. Citizens who travelled abroad became ready targets of thorough security searches and scrutiny at foreign airports and border terminals. The period also witnessed, inter alia, the gruesome murder of the environmental rights activist, Ken Saro Wiwa and nine others of his Ogoni kinsmen by the Abacha regime and the

expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations (Sklar, 2001, CNN, 1995). Again, the junta came under heavy economic and military sanctions including travel bans by the top military personnel and their family members. The poor-image rating of Nigeria under the Abacha regime led to the severance of hitherto friendly relations by most of the developed countries with some withdrawing their ambassadors and high commissioners while others such as Canada effectively shutting their diplomatic missions in Lagos and Abuja (Folarin, 2013). Nigeria's traditional trading partners froze up support and credit facilities even as aids and humanitarian assistance were limited much to the detriment of the ordinary Nigerian citizens.

Internally during the Abacha regime, people lived in social anguish, vicious poverty and economic misery. Citizens who daringly criticized the military government were marked and targeted for summary elimination. Dele Giwaa notable journalist had in an earlier military regime been summarily murdered by a parcel bomb in October 1986 by unnamed agents believed to have been masterminded by the ruling junta and his death signaled the dawn of a new era of bloody repression on critics of government. Those who escaped immediate death would not escape imprisonment without trial in competent courts of jurisdiction or charges preferred against them. Competent courts however, were also nonexistent then as the regime had relied mainly on military tribunals and related exclusive institutions for perpetuating corrupted justice on those considered by the regime be critical of it. Many unfortunate victims were, upon phantom allegations of coup plotting, rounded up, court-martialed and handed heavy sentences ranging from life imprisonment to death by execution. Economic activities were halted as both international and foreign investors pulled out their capital while civilian protests and street demonstrations were prevalent in the major commercial cities of Ibadan, Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Onitsha, Aba, among others. The

junta was also engaged in the politics of deceit and endless transition programmes. Gen Abacha coerced all then five political parties into adopting him as their sole presidential candidate. This act would make his transition from military to civilian president a fait accompli. He had equally succeeded in dividing the students' unions and youth movements in the land via the inglorious "Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha" organization. Pockets of market women organizations and labour groups were intimidated to endorse his candidature as president. At this stultifying stalemate situation, Nigeria's image receded to its lowest ebb and flattened out as every sphere of national life suffered under the Abacha regime. In Aginam (2010), the observation is apt;

“Unarguably, General Abacha's ascent to power marked Nigeria's descent to a level of repression unparalleled by any past military ruler. Such bestiality was most evident in his intensely predatory relationship with ... voices critical of his administration's wanton rights violations and self-succession agenda.”

International reaction to the Nigeria's poor image complimented the internal misery as resolutions were issued against the regime. For instance, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 50/199 on Nigeria on December 22, 1995, condemning “the executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the others”, while at the same time welcoming “the steps taken by the Commonwealth...and other possible actions by other States... to impose their own sanctions even without Security Council action.” (UN, 1999). Furthermore, a fact-

finding mission appointed by the U.N. Secretary General to Nigeria in April 1996, “reported damningly on the trial and execution of the Ogoni Nine, while also commenting on the general human rights situation in Nigeria” (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Meanwhile other key international players notably Britain, the United States of America and the European Union issued several sanctions against the Nigerian State. These include, the “suspension of military assistance and American economic aid and denial of entry into the United States for Nigerian officials” (Sklar, 2001). Prospective foreign investors increasingly found it difficult to do business in Nigeria as much was spent on graft and other non-appropriated items such as kickbacks and bribes to bureaucrats (Wapmuk and Agbalajobi, 2012; Enweremadu (2010); Ofose, 2014).

The lack of credibility of the regime's transition programme and the eventual annulment of the 1993 presidential election presumably won by M.K.O Abiola, increased the tempo of the decline in the nation's credibility and image abroad. The whole transition programme, which had gulped about N40 billion (Coker, Ugwu, & Adams, 2012; Awotide, 2005; Ajayi, 2005).

Against this backdrop, President Obasanjo emerged in the Nigerian political scene with the daunting task of resuscitating international image of the nation-state. In fact and as rightly been expressed, Nigeria has since the return of democracy in 1999 focused on developing strategic partnerships with traditional and emerging global powers, to support its domestic priorities. It has particularly “strengthened old relations and developed new ones, and has tried to balance its role as a regional and continental power, which addresses domestic concerns.” (Alao, 2011) From this standpoint also, Okerafor (2011) sees President Obasanjo's foreign policy objectives

as easily definable. For instance, his key priority was to restore or repair, where necessary, the battered image of the Nigerian State as a hitherto key player (especially among developing States). The new regime's agenda includes the fixing of the long-cherished economic partnerships of the key economic players notably the United States of America, the European Union (especially its traditional trading partner, Britain) and key organizations such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) among others. All of these had been driven out of the nation-state by the vicissitudes of military aberration typified by the earlier military dictatorships.

The strong desire as a nation-state to re-enact its active foreign policy against the foregoing lull characteristic of the years of unbroken military reign became the proclivity for the Obasanjo regime's diplomatic shuttle—a strategy that was employed for the image rebuilding and national rebranding course. The gains to Nigeria of these shuttles precisely constitute the major arousal for this study.

Shuttling as a diplomatic tool: A conceptual surmising

As an act and practice of conducting negotiation between nation-states, diplomacy ordinarily may be viewed as a process by which States, “without the resort to force, propaganda or law” achieve their foreign objective of attempting to change, alter or sustain the objectives or policies of each other (Holsti, 1983; Berridge, 2002). Bad diplomacy by a state manifests negatively in its foreign relations. It is an aspect of State business involving subtle bureaucratic bargaining as State officials make countless efforts to negotiate a trade deal, a truce, a development pact or any other issue of bilateral or multilateral benefits. The two-fold primary

role of diplomats is bargaining and communicating information between governments (Holsti, 1983). But aside this, diplomacy also seeks to protect nationals and their property and provide relevant advice for making overall policies and “negotiation has been the most important tool of diplomacy” (Meerts, 2014), while information gathering is a critical element in international negotiation (Amacker, 2011).

All of international relations may be seen to dovetail into either of two common relationships – conflicts or collaborations (Wolfers, 1962). Yet while shuttle diplomacy features mainly in one (conflicts), diplomatic shuttle features more in the other (collaborations). The terms “shuttle diplomacy” and “diplomatic shuttle” which are sometimes erroneously used interchangeably do not therefore mean the same thing. In fact, within the proper context of diplomacy and international relations, shuttle diplomacy feature mainly when mediating in the course of an international conflict resolution and it involves a third party doing the travelling between the principal parties in contention. Specifically, Fey and Ramsay (2010) in their empirical assessment of the worth of presidential commutes, maintain that shuttle diplomacy, “involves the intermediary meeting with each side in turn and relying on these discussions to progress towards a solution.” The third (or outside) party may be an institutional personality or group being merely represented by an individual (or group of individuals) in furtherance of the move to resolve the conflict. However, in collaborations, such as in trade deals or economic partnerships, diplomatic shuttle involving principal-to-principal contacts had prevailed (especially, but not always) when presidents of nation-states in the South make overtures to their counterparts in the North in quest for international development

partnerships. Such relationships may not necessarily be seen from a dominant-dependent standpoint though.

Making a direct contact between presidents provides an indication of the importance which these personalities place on their issue-field of discussion – issue that goes beyond the regular handling by the resident diplomats/ambassadors in those countries without necessarily undermining the sense of judgment of their respective emissaries. Regular diplomatic shuttles are conducted by envoys on behalf of their home governments and the number of trips on both sides may be countless.

Presidential travels, beside the risk elements involved are expensive and rare except on very important unavoidable missions. Principal-to-principal negotiation also symbolizes the high level of premium placed on the specific issue-field of discussion. Issue-fields of presidential one-on-one negotiation more often situate within the ambit of international collaboration as presidents seldom (or never) travel to meet opponent counterparts during conflicts and these often emanate from core foreign policy objectives which a nation cannot ignore. Majority of Barack Obama's foreign trips during his two-term tenure is economic more than security. For Olusegun Obasanjo and his successors Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, foreign travels are a tool for not only rebuilding Nigeria's international image but also and most importantly fine-tuning the international economic environment for the attraction of foreign investment/capital. Objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Prior to the end of the decolonization process in Africa and particularly since independence, Nigeria's foreign policy had been guided by certain objectives and principles which have remained consistent over several regimes (Akintola, 2007:439). Of

these, “the protection of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Nigerian State; the promotion of the economic and social well-being of Nigeria; the enhancement of Nigeria's image and status in the world at large; the promotion of unity as well as the total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Nigeria and Africa...” have featured prominently. (Ashiru, 2013; Akindele & Ale, 2000; Jina du, 2005; Olusanya & Akindele, 1986)

However, the apparent conclusion of the decolonization process in Africa and the emergence of a post-Apartheid geopolitical environment in Africa have provided new imperatives for the revision and reorientation of the aims of the Nigeria's foreign policy. The outcome of this exercise was the clear articulation of Nigeria's fundamental objectives and directive principles of foreign policy in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. These principles *inter alia* are “the promotion and protection of the national interest; the promotion of African integration and support for African unity; and respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and the promotion of a just world economic order” (The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chapter II, Section 19). Obasanjo's diplomatic shuttle strategy situates within these foreign policy objectives.

Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy thrust has continued to generate contending debates regarding its benefits to the local economy and citizens. Criticisms have trailed this policy as citizens observe with dismay that some of the countries in Africa which benefited from the Nigerian's Afrocentric largesse returned negligible (if any) attitude of acknowledgment for the favour done to them let

alone reciprocate in tangible terms. In fact, some of them have turned around to oppose Nigeria at major international forums, hurt and maim her citizens or out-rightly sabotaged her economic interests. For instance, Cameroon got quantum financial and other economic support from Nigeria during the eruption of the Cameroon Mountains first in October 1982 and then in 2000 more than any other African State. Yet apart from killing Nigerian soldiers on the border district (in contention), Cameroon was the first to hurry to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to contest the ownership of the disputed Bakassi Peninsula in 2003 claiming the territory “on grounds of historical consolidation of title ... and acquiescence” (Ezeilo, 2010, 159). Ongoing South Africa xenophobic attacks on Nigerian citizens just as the cumbersome South African visa procurement processes remain are instructive in this regard. These among other considerations should inform the paradigm shift of Nigeria's foreign policy to what has been described as a posture of concentric circles, (Gambari, 1989; Akinterinwa, 2004). The concentric circle theory revolves around the preponderance of national interest as a dominant factor in the conduct of foreign policy. The role of national interest as a primary object of power contention among States has been clearly articulated in Morgenthau (1967). In the view of Nigeria's former Minister of external affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, often regarded as the originator of concentric circle paradigm in Nigeria's foreign policy parlance, the country's national interest –comprising mainly its territorial integrity and political stability /independence, maintenance of domestic peace and security and then the growth and development of the national economy, forms the immediate (albeit real time) circle from which a larger West African and then African regional circle grow finally into the larger world circle. There may be debates as to whether the circles are three or

four (or even beyond) but the crucial element is that all the circles revolve around a co-center, a national interest nucleus on which all other objectives grow and or oscillate. The pursuit of the economic welfare and interest of citizen or citizen-centre diplomacy as former foreign minister, OjoMadueke terms it, remains critical in furtherance of these concentric objectives (Onyearu, 2007).

Obasanjo's Diplomatic Shuttles.

The tasks of re-integrating into the world politics and the challenges of restoring Nigeria's lost glory were among the primary concerns of the Olusegun Obasanjo's administration when it was inaugurated on May 29, 1999. The president attempted to achieve this through a flurry of international shuttles round the globe as the grand strategy in seeking to convert foreign policy activities into concrete achievements which are of direct benefit to Nigeria and especially its citizen's immediate economic needs. The main objective is "peace, security and prosperity through friendship" (Fayomi, Chidozie, & Ajayi, 2014). The President, during his extensive foreign trips, addressed the United Nations (UN), ECOWAS, the G8 Group, Group 77 (G-77), the Commonwealth of Nations, African Union (AU) European Union (EU) and a host of other State and non-State actors in the international arena.

President Obasanjo had to convince the international community that it would not be sufficient to return power to civilians without seeking to address some critical socio-economic problems confronting the country. He believed that there was need for a one-on-one discussion with relevant world leaders on debt relief, economic assistance, investment, regional security, enhanced international cooperation amongst others. He also held periodic meetings with Nigerians in the countries of his destinations during these visits. This is with a view to discussing issues of

common interest while at the time updating them on current government policies at home, as well as charting possible avenues for their assistance in moving the local economy forward. Saliu (2007:406) notes that the resort to frequent traveling by the President was all that was needed to re-package Nigeria for external consumption. The objectives of these shuttles basically were to re-integrate Nigeria into the comity of nations; to attract foreign investment and fresh financial flows; to secure debt relief/forgiveness from the country's creditors; and to promote Nigeria's export trade (NACCIMA, 2008).

Kolawole (2005) and Ajayi (2005) assert that Nigeria, under President Obasanjo's administration, had realistic alternatives to strengthening Nigeria's trade and bilateral relations with the U.S, and other great powers via diplomatic shuttling. Obasanjo's tours took him to places of prime economic importance for Nigeria. Prominent among these are the United States of America, which continue to be the largest single buyer of Nigeria's most important commodity, oil; Britain, a historically important trading partner and one of Nigeria's largest creditor-States, and to other members of the European Union, among which were Germany and France –major creditors and trading partners. He also visited key economic players in the Asian continent namely India, China, South Korea and Japan. For instance, President Obasanjo paid an early state visit to India in January 2000 and to South Korea in July 2000 and then back to India in a working visit in November 2004 –the one that was reciprocated by the Indian Prime Minister, as earlier stated, in October 2007. President Obasanjo also visited Indonesia where he addressed the D8 economic summit in May 2006. (African Year Book, 2006).

Many of Obasanjo's foreign shuttles were reciprocated. Indian Prime Minister paid a reciprocal visit in October 2007. In April 2006, Chinese president visited Nigeria in

response to Obasanjo's overtures although some analysts believe that there was much more diplomatic undertone of that visit than the mere cementing of economic ties. In Oculi (2016) for instance, the point is made that

“The visit to Nigeria by China's President and his large delegation of businessmen and scientists on 27 April, 2006, raises more than a matter of oriental tourism coming to Africa. The visit assumed immediate high diplomatic value following threats, by the United States Embassy, thrown with verbal and textual violence at President Olusegun Obasanjo's alleged wish to amend Nigeria's constitution to enhance his chances of being re-elected in 2007”

What were the shuttles' benefits?

From a critical point of view, foreign travels are expensive for a developing country like Nigeria. Moreso, a flurry of them may be “draining” to the national treasury just as a western Nigerian State-Governor Ayo Fayose had indicted current Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari of doing in his recent overseas travel (Nwaeze, 2016). In fact, weighed against the cost implications incurred in each trip that a Nigerian president makes, which understandably involves a retinue of state officials and some avoidable clout of government pressmen including other “politically-minded” entourage staffs (albeit party busybodies), it would make a strident argument that such foreign trips could have been avoided for the sake of the domestic economy. During his electioneering campaign for presidency, newly-elected US President

Donald Trump was quoted to have seriously criticized current Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari for his “senseless” overseas travels disposing bluntly;

“no sensible president continuously travels round the globe while his country ... is in terrible hardship and economic mess. It can only happen in Nigeria... Buhari, prior to his questionable victory at the polls... made lots of promises which he has obviously failed to keep and in most cases denied.”
(ThisDay, 2016)

Fey and Ramsay (2010) examine the worth of shuttle diplomacy as a tool for achieving international mediation and provide empirical bases for such commutes. Amidst the cacophony of criticisms which trailed the media over the president's frequent travel during the Obasanjo regime, sufficient evidence however can be deciphered to show that the Obasanjo's shuttles were immensely beneficial to the Nigerian national course. Shuaib (2002) summarized some of these achievements in his piece; thus

“...it must be appreciated that at least the Nigerian image has been enhanced and promoted, to some extent, by the trips. It is easy to recall that in no distant past Nigerian officials were rarely allowed into some countries, while the ordinary citizens hardly got visas to travel out, but today in the spirit of democracy, almost on daily basis the citizens are jetting out”

On his part, the President Obasanjo attached so much importance to the business of scouting and wooing foreign investments and laundering Nigeria's hitherto not-too-good image abroad especially during his first term in office. He personally justified his trip in avowed terms:

“As many of you are aware, I have devoted much time and energy journeying to virtually all corners of the globe in my personal efforts to positively reintegrate our country into the international community and attract investment. We are happy to report that the results from these trips have been encouraging enough to confirm my personal belief and the advice of marketing experts, namely, that personal contact is the best way to market your product. And my product is Nigeria”. (Oyedoyin, 2002).

Ezeife(2002) records that within 168 weeks of Obasanjo's election to the office of President, he made over 103 foreign trips averaging 1.63 trips per week of his Presidency from 1999 to 2002. This clearly captures the emphasis given to diplomacy shuttling in the search for foreign investors by the Nigerian government.

At this juncture, it is necessary to emphasize a pertinent variable in the president's diplomatic shuttles –foreign direct investment (FDI).In Dauda& Bako (2012) the possible sources of foreign direct investment flows through diplomatic shuttling have been very succinctly charted. Yet President

Obasanjo's diplomatic shuttles were directed at rebuilding Nigeria's messed image and developing awareness of investment opportunities. The trips were targeted at Investment Promotion in which Nigeria was repackaged for export. Image building consists of a wide range of separate functions and activities designed to create awareness of investment opportunities in the minds of investors. According to Garuba, (2008:15-16), President Obasanjo's administration was instrumental in gathering African leaders to work towards establishing a code of conduct in economic and political reforms that would satisfy the conditions and expectations of Western donors. At the June 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, Italy, Obasanjo was one of four leading African Heads of State to unveil an African initiated plan called the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Osagie (2007) notes that since the return to democratic rule 1999, international perception of Nigeria witnessed a positive change. The end of Nigeria's 'international isolation' status was symbolized by President Obasanjo's official visits to several hitherto estranged nations across the globe thus signifying the acceptance and its readmission into the comity of nations.

Notwithstanding, the score-card of Obasanjo's visit is impressive from the very beginning. Within a short period, various forms of social, political and economic ties have been forged with countries that once loathed Nigeria. Nigeria's full re-admission into the comity of nations is copiously attested to. In (Osagie, 2007) the success list is instructive. Among others, the shuttles led to a “swift re-admission into the Commonwealth” barely one month into the new regime. Others are the maiden election of Nigeria into the eight-member Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG);Nigeria's hosting of the

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2003; and the consultation and involvement of Nigeria in initiative concerning Africa such as the AFRICOM issue. The shuttles also secured the Open Skies Agreement with the US Airspace Agency in 1999 (US investment climate statement, 2008) while also the US lifted the ban on direct flight between Nigeria and the US (which was placed on Nigeria during the Gen. Abacha regime). Nigeria's frontline role in the G8 was also promoted during this regime. Consequently, it took up a central role in the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the institutionalization of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) –asa response to the development crisis in the continent. Furthermore, the peace building initiatives of the nation-state also flourished in the Obasanjo regime with Nigeria playing dominant roles in securing peace in conflict areas particularly in the African sub-region namely: “Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Ethiopia/Eritrea, DR Congo, Burundi, Western Sahara, Liberia, and Sao Tome and Principe is attributable in large measure to Nigeria's shuttle diplomacy/mediatory efforts.” (Osagie, 2007). By fine-tuning the international environment for FDI Obasanjo's foreign trips stimulated foreign investment. It secured an Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (IPPA) with Germany, a trade pact with India and renewed the faith of foreign investors as expressed by the several trade and investment delegations to Nigeria from Japan, China, India, U.S.A, Canada, U.K, South Africa, Denmark, Ghana, Turkey, France, Germany, Belgium, (Abdulai, 2007:17). Greece, Russia, Norway, Poland, Spain, Italy, Switzerland and Israel also established bilateral investment relations with Nigeria during this period (NIPC Annual Report, 2006; CBN Draft Annual

Report, 2008). The investment drive of Obasanjo paid out as evidenced by international data on the FDI position of the Nigerian State. For instance, Worldbank (2016) data show very clearly that by the end of 1999 (few months in office of the Obasanjo regime), Nigeria's net inflow of FDI using balance of payments values computed at current US\$ stood barely at US\$1.05 billion. However, this figure grew rapidly within just five year into its existence to US\$4.54 billion reaching US\$6.03 billion by the end of 2007. Comparatively, by 2015 (barely eight years after the President Obasanjo left the presidential seat), this figure had plummeted to a mere US\$3.064 billion (and still falling). Obasanjo's overtures abroad in his shuttles should undoubtedly be one the key explanations for this statistics.

At the domestic level, the Nigeria government embarked on a reform programme in late 2003 tagged the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The needs programme was specifically targeted at creating wealth, generating employment, reducing poverty and re-orienting national values of the nation-state. The NEEDS was just an aspect of the government's total reform programme generally targeted at four major areas namely: “macroeconomic reforms, structural reforms, public sector reforms and institutional and governance reforms.” (Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo Kwaako, 2007). “To ensure transparency and accountability in the management of the country's natural resources.” the Obasanjo's government in 2003 enrolled Nigeria in the league of countries in the Oslo-based Extractive Industries Transparency International (EITI) and thus created the Nigerian agency for the initiative christened

Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency International (NEITI) (NEITI, 2016).

The leadership also undertook a far-reaching privatization programme. The noose on freedom of expression and of the press, earlier tightened by the military regime was relaxed and human rights violations were reduced drastically. Controls over foreign investment were loosened through the relevant investment regulations issued by the Obasanjo administration to allow an appropriate treatment and protection of foreign investment. Between 1999 and 2007, “the Bureau of Public Enterprise (BPE) raised over \$4 billion by privatizing and concessioning more than 140 enterprises, including cement manufacturing firms, banks, hotels, and vehicle assembly plants” (US Investment Climate Statement, 2008).

One of the government's biggest macroeconomic achievements of Obasanjo's diplomatic shuttles has been the sharp reduction in its external debt, which declined from 36% of GDP in 2004 to less than 4% of GDP in 2007. On December 17, the United States and seven other Paris Club nations signed debt reduction agreements with Nigeria for \$18 billion in debt reduction, with the proviso that Nigeria pays back its remaining \$12 billion in debt by March 2006 (Osagie, 2007). Under Obasanjo, foreign investors were competing for Nigeria's large market (especially in telecommunications) and took advantage of its friendly population, cheap but qualitative labour and abundant mineral resources.

Also, the Obasanjo administration in Nigeria saw a leap in foreign earnings from 1999-2006 and enjoyed essential services that had long eluded Nigerians. Nigeria became investors' delight in information and

communication technology. Nigeria's telecommunication sector witnessed a fast-growing market with a subscription rate of over 60 million users between 2001-2005 (Ayanwale, 2007). The administration completely deregulated the telecommunications sector, most especially the much canvassed granting of license to Global System Mobile communication (GSM) service providers. The government also put in motion the privatization of Nigeria Telecommunication (NITEL). This proactive approach by the government and the telecommunication sector had made it possible for over 87 million Nigerians to clutch GSM phones today (CBN, 2014).

Since the liberalization of the telecommunications industry in 2001, capital investments in mobile networks and operations have constituted 80 per cent of overall investment going into the telecommunications sector – a total of more than \$12bn by the middle of 2008. Total figure for the industry, as of March 2010, according to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), reached \$18bn, of which \$16bn is related to mobile telecommunication. There have been significant increases in the level of foreign direct investment in the Nigerian telecommunications industry, especially since 1999. From a mere US\$ 50 million at the end of 1999, total private investment in the sector rose to about US\$ 2.1 billion by the end of 2002, out of which about 75% was attributable to mobile networks. At the end of 2003, total industry investment was estimated at about US\$ 3.8 billion. The industry investment was estimated at about \$18 billion in 2009 (CBN, 2014).

The NCC reported 64 million SIM cards in operation at the beginning of January 2009, with 23 million new subscribers signing

up in 2008, NCC (Ezeanyejí&Ifebi2016: 70). This growth of 55% in 2008 alone has encouraged a bout of local and multinational investors into the industry. In 2007, Telecommunications attracted the most private participant investment in Africa (86% of total)(CBN, 2014). Nigeria claimed the dominant share of the \$9.5 billion (reportedly the highest since 1990) at 28% (\$2.66 billion) followed by South Africa at 11% (\$1.045 billion) (Dauda, 2007). Deregulation of the Nigerian Telecommunications system in 2001 gave way to private involvement which in turn led to emergence of major players in the field - both local and international companies.

However plausible the diplomacy shuttles of that administration seemed to be, there are some analysts who have some knocks against the initiative. For example, the critics of such diplomatic option argue that his frequent overseas visits painted a very sad picture of a leader who paid more attention to foreign issues at the cost of local ones. According to Ezeife (2002) the Obasanjo's diplomatic shuttles were just a convenient opportunity for politicians to move stolen funds abroad as well as garner travel allowances in the process. This view was informed by the large entourage and frequency of such foreign trips. David-West (in Ezeife, 2002) rather believe that attracting foreign investment is not determined by the diplomatic shuttling of President Obasanjo but depended much on how Nigerians and Nigeria conducted themselves. If the name Nigeria remains synonymous with fraud there is no chance that any person would be lured to invest in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The foregoing discussion on the gains of the Obasanjo regime's diplomatic shuttles has shown that beside the psychological relief following its reintegration into the international community, Nigeria had, within

its concentric-rings sphere, re-assumed its leadership role in several international organizations notably the ECOWAS, AU, and G-77. This yielded some economic dividends for the Nigerian State which included the increase in Development Finance Inflow (DFI), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Portfolio Investments, the cancelling of \$18 billion of the country's over \$30 billion external debt owed the Paris Club—a gesture which signifies the Club's confidence in the country's economy and credibility as an external debtor. The recent refund in 2016 from the Paris Club to Nigeria on its overpayment in debt settlements further extends and consolidates the discussion on the benefits of the Obasanjo's diplomatic shuttles. It must be particularly observed that the president Obasanjo's shuttles were the main engine for the resurgence of FDI inflow into the country. What his regime did was: enabling the adoption of foreign policy towards reintegration of the country into the comity of nations; image building to help create an awareness of the conducive and stable macroeconomic environment that abound for foreign investors to operate; and resulting in greater establishment and resuscitation of bilateral/multilateral investment relations for home advantage.

This foregoing discourse shows that President Obasanjo was confronted with the daunting task of managing an unpleasant image the protracted military putsch earned for Nigeria. Also, he was faced with the responsibilities of repositioning Nigeria for foreign direct investments and boosting the quality of lives of Nigerians and uplifting their low psyche and morale towards nation building.

For a sustained and robust foreign investment inflow and good image of Nigeria, policy makers in Nigeria should ensure that international diplomacy is aimed at addressing

some of the critical national developmental questions. These questions bother notably on the issues of basic infrastructure, which has remained a thorny domestic challenge preventing the creation of a friendly investment climate that boosts public and international image. Bilateral and multilateral relations should be directed at strengthening the State's currency, the Naira, which international value has plummeted radically in the midst of falling international oil prices. Besides consolidating the national image-building, diplomacy should be directed at promoting the welfare of Nigerian citizen and assist in alleviating mass poverty from the countryside. Finally, diplomacy should help in eradicating the scourge of the Boko Haram and other insurgent groups in the country if its economic and social development visions are to be realized. However, from the foregoing discourse, it is not hard to canvass that Obasanjo's shuttle diplomacy during the 1999-2007 period earned his country benefits.

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