

What's good?

Preamble:

One thing is certain: The last Spirit left in Pandora's Box, once all the evil ones had escaped, was Hope. It is good to recognize a hopeful situation. Hope is on the ascendancy in Nigeria. Once upon a time, the United African Company (UAC), the shining light in the Nigerian business firmament became a knight in blurred glory. Same fate befell Nigeria from the late 1980s. The once impressive stature of Nigeria in Africa shrunk into her greatness. Her leaders failed to understand that the time was gone when a country could ignore foreign opinion of its conduct at home, lamely insisting on the policy of non-interference in its internal affairs. The late Dr. John Garang, leader of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army SPLA, once advanced a "failure to manage diversity" as one of the causes of his country's civil wars. Our national conflagration – Biafra, Sharia riots, civil war, MASSOB, OPC, Niger Delta crisis – posits failure to tolerate and appreciate diversity. Failure to vertically integrate the UAC's far flung divisions looked like one of the reasons the hitherto brilliant stars of the behemoth diminished after the retirement of Dr. Abebe.

Globalization seemed to have caught the UAC management unawares, unprepared, untrained. It was evident that its main decision making organ lacked integrated knowledge of the latest skills and the global market place which formal education doesn't necessarily impact. Privatization and commercialization reveal the post-Abebe but pre-Ajayi senior management of UAC, short of analytical, numerate heads with foresight. The withdrawal of its technical partners UAC International seems to have emptied it of planners, visioners and the ability to handle challenges and rivals. It offered no offense and dithered in defense as nimble indigenous competitors crashed into its stronghold. Nigeria's pioneer *Fast Moving Consumer Goods* (FMCG) conglomerate stuttered. There seems to be some synergy in the decline and reversal of fortunes

in Niger House, Ubani House and the Apapa headquarters of Lever Brothers. THE MOST STRATEGIC ASSET IN THE GLOBAL MARKET PLACE IS BRAINS! Certificates, I dare say, is not always synonymous with brains. UAC and Nigeria failed to control the “*Known Unknowns*”, apologies to US vice President Dick Cheney. How much more could it contemplate and map out strategies to handle the “*Unknown unknowns*”! The Nigerian State relied on military expedition and occupation – hard power – to tame the neglected Niger Delta. The handing of Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni Seven has reproduced multiples in arsons, bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, executions and lawlessness. It never occurred to state minders to deploy amenities, stakeholders meetings, citizen’s forum, interventionist agencies and interactive sessions – soft power – in pacifying the source of the nation’s revenue and foreign exchange life line. Soetsu Yanagi, in his classic 1972 book on folk art *The Unknown Craftman*, observed that “Man is most free when his tools are proportionate to his needs”. The tools for daily existence in the polluted Niger Delta must not only be available but be relevant to its people. Officialdom must be equipped with innovative social developmental experts in this most vital assignment.

IT IS NOT OVER

Hope is in the Nigerian horizon again as can be seen in the re-birth of UAC. Mr. Ayo Ajayi is widely perceived to have re-engineered the once moribund giant. Today, UAC is a good thing. The opposite was its lot between the days of Dr. Abele and Mr. Ajayi. The ‘Ajayite’ dreams are positively touching Nigerians. Happily, Mr. Ephraim Effah is joyously furthering those dreams. Hope is making tentative debut in Aso Rock. The person of President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua is sweet aroma in the party of Ali and Baba and ‘the forty thieves’ expected to grace the prisons courtesy of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission EFCC, plea bargain allowing! *Moving Nigeria Forward, The Yar’ Adua and Goodluck Team*, a publication of the 2007 Presidential Inauguration Committee aptly reasoned

that “an unfriendly security climate precludes both external and internal investment into the nation”. Vice President Jonathan Goodluck’s trip to meet the militants of the Niger Delta is a good thing. There’s hope in the committee set up for the area. Hope is alive, even if it’s not well, presently. Hope is alive and well at Niger House. UAC is paying dividends after some comatose years. The rich cried when it slept in the stock market. Many hearts and purses bled. Since it started live in 1879, the times have changed. It slightly looks different, mutating into the 21st century but its organizational and corporate social responsibility remains good and stronger than before, one presumes. UAC may be Nigeria’s only big business of the 19th century still extant. That is good. One day, it will join *Les Henokiens* (the Enochs), a French fraternity formed in 1981 of companies that are at least 200 years old. Interestingly, merger, break-up, acquisition and bankruptcy have by 1983, killed one – third of the firms in the Fortune 500 list of 1970. Hope doesn’t take anything and everything for granted. Hope is innovative. Hope appraises. Hope prepares for challenges, hence it never dies.

ACROSS BORDERS

Hope is the unsaid secret or China’s dominance today in the fields of manufacturing, assembly, services and outsourcing. The Chinese scent profit in chaos. You can see it in their Africa policy. Their aphorism; “there is a great disorder under heaven. The situation is excellent”, helps them navigate troublesome Dafur and peaceful Botswana, reaping huge benefits in trade and commerce. The United State is the continent of Hope. The bedrock of the American Dream is hope. The most amazing miracle in American polity today is Senator Barack Obama. He is the hope of African – Americans and a small, disaffected ratio of white America plagued by Afghanistan, Iraq, Karl Rove, Tom Delay and other Republican scandals, who sees the re-birth of hope in Senator Obama. Appropriately, his recently published book is titled *Audacity of Hope*. Even if misplaced now, African – American presidential electoral hope, will someday, be realized post Obama. The American Dream is not infallible! It is

Project Hope because “it’s in the feeling of dreaming and the joy of pursuing your dreams”, Katrina, slavery, and segregation notwithstanding. Italian statesman and writer Italo Calvino enthused that “all towns have corners of happiness, if you know what to look for”. Hope has substance. Hence Derek Walcott, the St. Lucian born 1972 Nobel Prize winner in literature observed that “every noun has its echo”. Good sound is out from Niger House and Aso Rock love is in the air, remarked kool and the Gang in *Love Festival!* The echo of hope tickles despite our every pain. In the brief treatise following, we will look at a few corners of happiness, the echoes of revival in our shores and in Diaspora. Our faith is hope. And we hope in faith.

LET’S GO

What’s good in Nigeria? President Yar’ Adua’s insistence in the rule of law and adherence to the aims of the justice system is good. He demonstrated it by not asking the Justice Ministry to re-interpret the judgment given against Andy Uba’s PDP government in Anambra State, a trade mark of his predecessor. July 2007, the President released the sum of N10.8 billion Lagos State Local Government funds confiscated by his predecessor in 2004 despite a Supreme Court order that he had no power to withhold them. Because governance for Yar-Adua is not a “do or die affair”, he formed a government of national unity. His predecessor drove away 28 of the 32 founding fathers of the Peoples Democratic Party PDP – a party they established without him. Today, Yar Adua is wooing them back into the party. The President is demonstrating ability to manage diversity that Col John Garang would have applauded. That is wonderful.

What’s good? Nigerian women are good. In Obasanjo’s administration, women outpaced men, Prof. Charles Soludo excepting. The head of the Economic Team was also Finance Minister, Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo – Iweala. A fiscal conservative the Harvard trained economist and former World Bank Vice President and Corporate Secretary brought sanity and discipline into public

finances. Largely at her behest, Nigeria was forgiven \$18 billion by the London Club of Creditors. The IT enabled Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System IPPIS, put in place brought about a reliable and comprehensive re-appraisal of public sector accounting. Today, she is a Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institutions, a respected Washington Think Tank. Dr. Oby Ezekwesili was the first head of the Due Process Office and later Minister of Education, now she is a World Bank Vice President. Professor Dora Akuyili, the Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control NAFDAC, is without doubt, the most famous head of any food and drugs regulatory agency in the world. She has received accolades worldwide, even in the face of attempted assassinations. July 2007, Zheng Xiaoyu, head of China's State Food and Drug Administration was hanged for accepting 6.5 million yuan (\$ 850,000) in bribes to approve substandard medicines, foods and goods. Professor Joy Ogwu had a short but credible tenure as Foreign Affairs Minister. Mrs. Esther Nenadi Usman tried to continue the worthy legacies of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo - Iweala. Mrs. Olueremi Oyo was an untiring Senior Special Assistant SSA (Media) to President Obasanjo before re-assignment as the Managing Director of News Agency of Nigeria, NAN. The Fifth Republic House of Representatives has as Speaker the Hon. (Mrs.) Patricia Etteh, a first in our nation. A female minister may be the star of Yar Adua's cabinet. The Federal Roads Management Agency FERMA confessed that only 15% of the 34,000km federal road network is in motorable. One of the worst is the Lagos - Benin Road, which the delectable Minister for Transportation, Mrs. Diezani Allison - Madueke braved by road from Benin to Ore. After the torture, the horrified Minister apologized to Nigerians - a first! Thousands have been raped, assaulted, robbed and damaged on federal and state roads. Death is a common sight, destruction a living phenomenon on our roads. With Allison - Madueke, there's hope..

What's good about Nigeria? Our arm forces and Police have the most credible records in regional, continental and global peace keeping assignments. Some UN peacekeepers from Asia have been indicted in Cote D' Voire and the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC. Unsurprisingly, General Martin Luther Agwai, Nigeria's former Chief of Defense Staff is the Commander of the 20,000 UN/AU hybrid peacekeeping forces to Dafur where some 250,000 have died and over 2million are refugees from the heavy hand of Janjaweed militia.

What's good in Nigeria? In 2001, President Obasanjo thundered that only mad men can live in Lagos! His hatred for the nation's commercial and media capital was not hidden. In a sweet reversal, Lagos is now a planned Presidential Retreat for Yar Adua. It will be a venue for constant talks with Governors Babatunde Fashola and Gbenga Daniel about plans to develop Lagos as a mega-city. Because Lagos is not a haven for lunatics so found, President Yar Adua will come there for recreation, contemplation, rest and relaxation.

What's good? From a miserable 500,000 telephone lines in 1999, Nigeria has over 40millions lines now. From a former city privilege to the very rich and well connected, my mother in my Delta State hamlet can be reached, network permitting. Telephony has brought about better life via e-commerce, e-banking, e-learning, correspondence, reduced travel, data services, e-government, health management and service delivery. May 16, 2006, the Senate threw out some 107 supposed constitutional amendments, among which the infamous was Tenure Elongation dream of the ex-president known as *Third Term*. That was good law making!

Jake Ekpelle makes Nigeria good. A pastor, Albino and a very educated and well traveled business man, he is succeeding in a very proud mission to stop discrimination against Albinos. MKO makes Nigeria good, despite his very painful death in terrible circumstances in 1998. A mediagenic business angel, philanthropist and politician, his Hope '93 Organization won him Nigeria's freest and fairest presidential election. He achieved that with enduring links to

some principals in this federal administration like president Yar Adua's late brother, the Tafidan Katsina, General Shehu Yar Adua who built the political umbrella that MKO used. Secretary to the Federal Government, Alhaji Baba Gana Kingibe was his running mate and close family friend. The death of Bashorun Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola forced the military to quit power in 1999.

What's good about Nigeria? It's the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC. Created in 2003, it has made commendable efforts in fighting corruption though political pressure made it to mostly zero on opposition figures just as it allows plea bargains now, a questionable provision alien to our laws and justice system. From the fertile brain of Professor Charles Soludo, the nation is in the midst of a well articulated financial re-positioning. In July 2004, the cerebral economist announced that N 25 billion will be the minimum capital requirement for banks effective December 2005. The measure saw the nation's 89 banks trim to 25 better, fitter, IT enabled institutions. The re-organization was deemed the best undertaking of its kind, and won Prof. Soludo the World Central Banker of the year 2005 by the London based *Banker Magazine*, the leading publication in its field. July 2007 in far away Beverly Hills, California USA, the *African Times* awarded Professor Soludo the African Banker of the year 2006.

What's good? The erudite Central banker is determined to make Nigeria a centre of global financial services. This informed why he thought up the Financial Systems Strategy (FSS) 2020 envisaged positioning the nation's financial system not only as a regional hub, but among the top twenty financial centres of the world by 2020. He wants the Lekki Financial Corridor – a planned financial Free Trade Zone – to dispense funds and financial services globally competitively like Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong. It will come equipped with its own regulatory, security, police and legal systems. In 2006, our GDP of \$113 billion benefited from 6.01 per cent growth.

What's good about Nigeria? The banking reforms have brought in billions in Foreign Direct Investment, FDI. August 2007, IBTC Chartered merged with Stanbic Bank of South Africa. The ₦50.30billion marriage will see share holders of IBTC Chartered smiling to their, where else, banks in the largest shareholder payment in the Nigerian Capital Market. It is a new day for Nigerian banking., the post consolidation portfolio re-alignment in the financial industry, the consequent investors confidence that have greatly doubled the capital base, the fall of interest rates in the money market and new equity listings that have diversified investment avenues, leading to appreciable portfolios by individual and corporate accounts gave the Nigerian Stock Exchange NSE, its historic N 1trillion transaction value and 51,000 - point index on July 23, 2007. In the whole of 2006, the turnover was N 470billion. The turnover ratio (which gauges the market liquidity) leaped from 6.72 percent inn the last seven months to 15.6 percent. And Prof. Soludo is still the nation's financial Brain Box!

What's good? Nigerians in Sweden have established *Fixmyvisa.com* "to make obtaining travel visas to any country in the world easier for millions of people who have difficulties doing so". An open online agency, it is envisaged that "with Fixmyvisa.com, no matter the country or destination involved, people will get access to the best visa and migration experts in the world at prices they can afford". A good thing happened to Diaspora and sub-Saharan Nigeria this year when Odon Akanimo, a 26 year old doctoral student of Environmental Studies at the University of Wales was named British Council International Student of the Year Award 2006 in Great Britain. He was received by ex- Prime Minister Tony Blair. February 3-4 20 07, Akanimo had at the Great Hall of Lancaster University organized a seminar with the theme: Networking Nigerian Students (Youths) in Diaspora for National Development (Youth Potentials: Imperative for Sustainable Development).

What's good in Nigeria? Barrister Shamsey Oloko, co-founder and ex-president of Nigerian Lawyers Association (NLA), New York is one of the twelve

commissioners representing the twelve judicial districts in New York. June 2006, he was named to the New York State Impendent Judicial Election Qualification Commission. This important commission is according to the State Chief Judge, "the newly established state wide network of screening panels to review the qualifications of judicial election candidates". In 2003, Dr. Oluyemi Badero, a distinguished Cardiologist received the Congressional Record Citation from the US House of Representatives. June 2007 was the turn of Dr. Chamberlain Peterside, a New York based financial executive. He was honoured for distinguished services to his local community.

What's good? Femi Oke, the wispy -velvety voice laced with an almost indecipherable British accent is good on Inside Africa and weather reports on the Cable News Network (CNN), the world's most ubiquitous cable broadcast organization. The suave, gentlemanly Victor Oladokun is good with a christian conviction as he brings the name and glory of Christ Jesus to millions around the world on the CBN Network. Hanna Osunsina is a positive role model. The very brilliant -she had distinctions in her GCE O'Levels -- and beautiful 19 year old University of Bedfordshire law undergraduate was enthroned the Most Beautiful Black Girl in Britain July 2007. GOJE AFRICAN is good with Isaac and Nneka, Moses as anchors.

What's good about Nigeria? Sports have brought out the best of Nigeria. Time and space will not allow detailed rendition of our laureates. At the 9th All African Games held in Algiers from 11-23 July 2007, our men and women did us proud. Gold winners include Olusoji Fasugba ion 100metres athletics, Doreen Amata in High Jump, Nurudeen Salim in Men's 110 metres Hurdles Final and Damola Osayemi in 100metres Women's Sprint. The best of Nigeria may be found in literature. The awards and honours given to Professors. Chinua Achebe - the Asiwaju of Nigerian Literature - and Wole Soyinka - the Ogbuefi of Nigerian Literature - are too numerous to mention in this write-up. Both of them are human rights activists of note. Achebe's The Trouble With Nigeria is perhaps the

most insightful dissection of our national ills. He famously rejected a National Award from President Obasanjo, a move welcomed by Nigerians suffocating under perceived dictatorship of the Balogun of Owu Egba. Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka has had running battles with despots of all shades from the 1960s to the 21st Century. Prof. Isaac Niyi Osundare of the University of New Orleans is one of the most celebrated poets alive. In August 2005 Hurricane Katrina took away his invaluable manuscripts, books, letters, journals and computers, but he is still hopeful. His latest book of poems is Evening of a Smile. The Queen of Nigerian Literature is 28 year old Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a doctoral student in the USA. Purple Hibiscus won her the Commonwealth Writers Prize for First Book. Half of a Yellow Sun won her the Orange Prize Broadband for Fiction 2007. And she's just getting started!

Science is good to Nigeria. Home based and Diaspora scientists have and are doing us proud. The Philip Emeagwalis and the Ovadjes are excelling in all fields from aerospace to zoology. The Pat Utomis represent a homegrown positive intelligentsia. The Olisa Agbakobas are the conscience of the nation, even in the face of state sponsored brutality of yore. The Dangotes and Adenugas are the beautiful side of native entrepreneurship that will make Nigeria great. They are good.

What's good about Nigeria? It's in moviedom, in Nollywood, the third largest film industry globally. Olu Jacobs and Joke Silver are good. The same with Stella Damasus, Omo Sexy, Genevieve, Kate Henshaw -Nuttal, RMD, Segun Arinze, Chioma Chukwuka, Ramsey Noah and the whole tribe of actors and actresses. Ben Murray Bruce, the pillar of the Silverbird Group is the bible of show biz in Nigeria. Nigerians have a solid grip on African music. The stars of yesterday like Fela have left the stage for TU Face, Paul Play Dairo, Sunny Nneji, Faze, Weird MC, Femi Kuti, P - Square, Style Plus and others. We are good with Committee for Relevant Arts CORA, a great mobilizer of arts and culture. Africa Independent Television AIT, Silverbird Television, and Nigerian Television

Authority NTA are good. In newspapering, the Guardian is a reference point in Africa.

HERE'S THE BEST

What good in Nigeria? It's our future! The Future Awards 2007 Winners includes 23 year old Dumebi Agbakoba who raised fund for noble causes through *DoSomething Positive Nigeria*. Best Use of Technology went to *Cygress* for developing excellent portals for major brands. Entrepreneur of the Year was Bukola Adubi recognized at 28 years for unbreakable success with the Miccom Brand. Professional of the Year was Modupe Adefeso, 28, who dreamt up and successfully managed a new profession. For being first on the firing line of online business solutions, *Whogobuy* founders whose aged range from 25, 27 and 30 were named Team of the Year. The Youth Advocacy Awards went to 29 year old Oluwagbenga Sesan, a familiar name on the International stage and 28 year Moses Iyayi, a grandfather of HIV/AIDS advocacy and 20 year old Temidayo Israel - Abdulai, a UK based patriot who has become the necessary link and rallying point for home - minded young Diaspora Nigerians. Nigeria's future is good indeed! This writer celebrates all these and much more that is good about Nigeria. I celebrate UAC, a truly Nigerian company, a good outfit. I celebrate the Ajayi - onwards management. I celebrate your hard working staff. Your brand is good. I celebrate your loyal and valued consumers since 1879, dead and living. My two wonderful sons NONSO and EBUBE are very good. They are part of Nigeria's New Dawn. I celebrate them! And UAC, can you celebrate me?