



Summary

„ Nigeria - Tinubu after 100 days in office: successes, challenges and outlook”

13 September 2023, 13:00 – 14:15hrs

Virtual via Zoom

Background Information

Nigeria's new President Bola Ahmed Tinubu was sworn in on 29 May 2023. The politician from the *All Progressives Congress* (APC) took over the office from his party colleague Muhammadu Buhari, who stepped down after two terms in office. Tinubu had prevailed against former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the *Peoples' Democratic Party* (PDP) and Peter Obi of the *Labour Party*, who was considered an outsider. Both Obi and Abubakar challenged the election results in court.

The political and economic situation in the country is considered tense and presents Tinubu with numerous challenges: For example, the deregulation of the national currency, the naira, led to a drastic fall in the exchange rate, which in turn drove up commodity prices. At the same time, the new government's decision to lift the long-standing fuel subsidy led to a noticeable rise in petrol prices. The coup in neighbouring Niger is also exacerbating the deteriorating security situation in the region and increasing the pressure on Tinubu, who currently chairs the regional community ECOWAS.

What has the Tinubu's government achieved after 100 days in office? What are the key challenges for the coming months and years? And what can be expected from Tinubu's policies regarding German-Nigerian relations and Nigeria's role in the region?

These and other questions were at the core of the discussion organised by the German Africa Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

Highlights

- The reforms introduced by the new government were urgently needed, but their implementation has been criticised. The reforms should have been implemented in a more strategic and phased manner, and cushioning mechanisms should have been offered to the population. Given the economic challenges and reforms, it is necessary to reduce government spending in order to minimise the financial burden on the population.

Welcome Remarks

Sabine Odhiambo

Secretary General,
German Africa Foundation

Moderation

Jochen Luckscheiter

Head of the Heinrich Böll
Foundation office in Abuja

Discussion

Cynthia Mbamalu

Human rights lawyer and co-
founder of *Yiga Africa*

Chinenye Uwanaka

Lawyer and founder of the
*Africa Policy Conversations
Initiative* (AFPC)

Commentary

Jibril Jibril

Economic and Commercial
Counsellor, Embassy of the
Federal Republic of Nigeria
in Berlin

Alexandre Callegaro

Deputy Head of Department
West Africa, Federal Foreign
Office



- Although the opposition is numerically stronger - and more diverse - in parliament after the election, it has not yet been able to fulfil its function as a representative of citizens' interests vis-à-vis the government.
- As Africa's most populous country, Nigeria is aware of its leading role both in the region and on the continent. As chairman of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS), President Tinubu emphasises the importance of democracy and regional stability.

Reforms and challenges

The panel agreed that the Tinubu government had already implemented important and urgently needed reforms. These include, in particular, the deregulation of the naira and the abolition of fuel subsidies. However, the implementation of the reforms was criticised. Cynthia Mbamalu, among others, criticised that these had been implemented too early, without strategic planning and without cushioning mechanisms. In addition, the reforms had all been implemented at the same time, which had further increased the financial burden on the population, added Chinenye Uwanaka. As a result of the currency reform, inflation and thus the cost of living for citizens had risen further. The fuel subsidies had also driven up transport costs and the energy costs for power generators, which also affected small businesses. Numerous businesses have closed as a result and people have been robbed of their livelihoods. It is therefore necessary to strategically plan reforms and their announcement and then implement them transparently, emphasised Uwanaka. The government and its members should also be prepared to reduce their expenditure and allowances in order to show the population that they are not bearing the financial burden alone. In this context, the size of the new cabinet, which at 47 ministers is larger than that of the previous government, would be another cause for concern.

Tinubu's cabinet

In addition to the size of the cabinet, there was also criticism of its composition. Although Tinubu had announced during his election campaign that he would aim for a 35% representation of women in his government, the figure is now only 19%, Mbamalu sharply criticised. Some cabinet appointments had also raised the question of whether political loyalties played a greater role here than professional qualifications, which would further undermine the population's trust in democracy. Accordingly, there was an urgent need to demonstrate transparent and responsible governance, particularly with regard to the use of the money saved by the cancellation of the fuel subsidies. These funds should be used specifically for projects that improve people's living conditions and at the same time enhance the role of women and young people.

Youth participation and Education

The average age of Nigeria's population is currently 18 - the promise to invest in youth development therefore played an important role in Tinubu's election campaign. According to the participants, in order to give young people prospects in Nigeria, comprehensive investment in education, entrepreneurship and the diversification of the economy was needed in addition to strengthening democratic processes and institutions. The *Student Loan Bill* passed in June of this year was an important step in this direction. Nevertheless, a more careful revision of the law would also have been necessary here so that it would actually meet the needs of students, said Mbamalu.



Role of the Opposition

The opposition has an important function - not only as a counterweight to the government, but also as a critical body to scrutinise and improve government policy in the interests of the citizens. This would require constructive cooperation between the government and the opposition as well as the ability to not only criticise government proposals, but also to propose alternative solutions, emphasised Mbamalu. Although the opposition was much more strongly represented in the National Assembly in this legislative period, their hopes for a qualitatively strong opposition have not yet been fulfilled, Mbamalu continued. Instead of debating bills thoroughly and constructively and, if necessary, proposing amendments, laws were being waved through parliament, as was the case with the *Student Loan Bill*, for example. In the discussion on subsidy cuts, the debates in parliament also centred on the question of how much money the state would receive from the savings and not how the consequences of the subsidy cuts could be cushioned for the population. This would show that the opposition, despite its numerical strength, is not yet fulfilling its role as a supervisory body for the government and representative of citizens' interests. However, a qualitatively strong opposition could contribute to an enormous strengthening of political institutions and sustainably improve democratic processes in Nigeria.

Nigeria's role in the region and on the international stage

In his inaugural speech, President Tinubu emphasised that Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country, was aware of its leading role on the continent and that it would work towards solidarity on the continent. Mbamalu said that Nigeria was also showing even greater regional willingness to take responsibility and leadership since Tinubu took over the chairmanship of ECOWAS. ECOWAS' firm reaction to the recent coup in Niger demonstrated its commitment to the values of democracy and stability in the region. Nevertheless, she criticised the rush to impose sanctions and the threat of military intervention. Instead, she would have expected a stronger focus on diplomacy and political pressure as a means of restoring constitutional order. The imposition of harsh economic sanctions against the neighbouring country had also affected economic activities in the border region and thus contributed to a shift in the discourse in Nigeria, explained Mbamalu. In addition, the communication had failed to present the decision as a joint decision by the heads of state and government of the ECOWAS members and not as an individual decision by the chairman and president of Nigeria. According to Alexandre Callegaro, Germany had supported the clear stance of ECOWAS towards undemocratic changes of government and supports the role of regional organisations such as ECOWAS or the African Union (AU) in their approaches. It would be crucial to have African players on the ground who take responsibility and show international partners the way.

Importance of German-Nigerian Relations

Jibril Jibril and Callegaro agreed that German-Nigerian relations were very close and multi-faceted. For example, the two countries were working together in the energy sector and the new government would also continue the close cooperation, said Jibril. The cooperation between Germany and Nigeria would extend far beyond conventional bilateral cooperation, emphasised Callegaro. Both countries would share common interests and values, and Germany was appreciating Nigeria's and ECOWAS' clear position on the coup in Niger as well as Nigeria's solidarity since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Nigeria was a key partner for Germany on the African continent and the participation of Nigeria and other African countries in international affairs would be highly valued. This is why the inclusion of the AU in the G20 group was supported, as well as African calls for reform of the UN Security Council. The need for a new type of relationship between the so-called 'West' and Africa based on



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honesty and respect was also emphasised. Initiatives such as the return of the Benin bronzes from German museums and the strengthening of cultural cooperation were a first step in this direction. Germany would continue to be a reliable partner for Nigeria in the future, both in bilateral cooperation and in joint efforts to overcome global challenges.